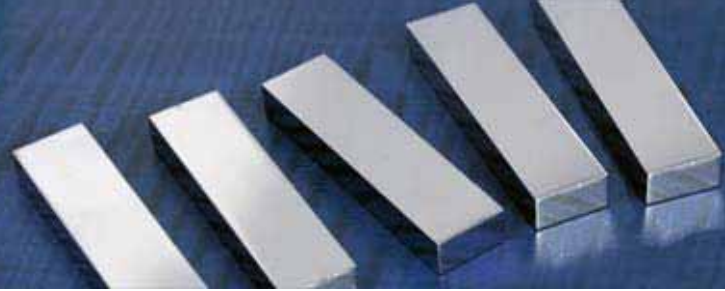


# The Five Platinum Rules to Online Advertising Creative



Online advertising can deliver platinum results, but just like any media vehicle, under-performing creative can sabotage a campaign. Good strategy and effective creative execution are necessary ingredients to achieve success. Below are five crucial elements of successful online advertising creative.

## 1) Know the purpose of your campaign and the psychological mechanism of your ad

The marketer and agency need to agree explicitly on the objective of the ad campaign and the psychological mechanism to achieve the objective. For example sales might be the objective of the ad and the mechanism could be:

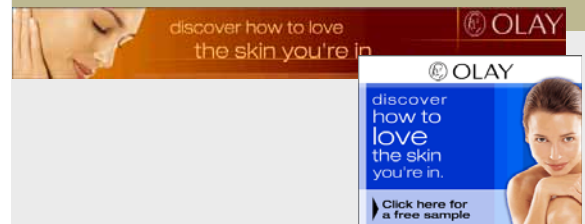
- **Reminder:** Used to move an established brand up the mental agenda of the consumer
  - This mechanism works well for established brands in low involvement categories such as consumer packaged goods. The ad's primary function is to get the consumer to think of and reach for the brand upon their next purchase occasion. As we will elaborate on further in this paper, brand persistence and product imagery are important elements for this mechanism.
- **Reinforcement:** Used to strengthen specific pre-existing perceptions about a brand
  - This works well for both lower and higher involvement categories, provided that the consumer has some level of familiarity with the brand. Take Olay as an example. The goal of this ad is to strengthen the brand promise of beauty. The simple iconic imagery of the attractive face and brand mark are an effective way to reinforce the beauty perception.
- **Reposition:** Used to change existing brand perceptions
  - Brands may choose to incorporate new messages in their brand promise. An online ad facing the task of repositioning should leverage both brand persistence and iconic messaging to connect this new brand promise to the existing brand. In the Volvo ad the gear shifter is the iconic image sending the new message of sporty.
- **Introduce:** Used to launch a new product or brand
  - Introducing a new product using the internet can be effective, but once again, brand presence and a simple message are important. If the message is more complicated, consider using higher visibility ad formats such as interstitials and over the page units as McDonald's did with the launch of their Flatbread Sandwich.
- **Direct response:** Used to generate leads, sell, etc.
  - For products sold online, direct response ads can be very profitable. For this type of ad a call to action and clear benefit are crucial. Netflix shows the value of concise direct response copy.

### 5 Psychological Mechanisms

#### Reminder of an existing brand



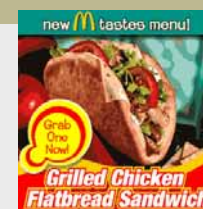
#### Reinforce existing perceptions



#### Reposition an existing brand



#### Introduce a new product or brand



#### Direct Response

#### Netflix delivers DVD rentals to your home

✓ No Late Fees ✓ Over 25,000 Titles ✓ Free Shipping [Try Netflix for FREE](#)



# The Five Platinum Rules to Online Advertising Creative

## 2) Apply Brand Mark Persistently

Brand persistence should be used no matter what the psychological mechanism of the ad. This ensures that, at minimum, the ad strengthens top of mind awareness of the brand. At maximum, persistent brand presence will ensure linkage of the key visual message back to the brand.

**TIP:**

Use the glance test to determine whether a consumer can quickly and readily identify the brand being advertised. Be sure that the brand logo is visible in the context of a web page regardless of the format or size of the ad. The brand logo should be in all frames of the ad.

Figure 1 shows two slightly varying ads for Volvo. The ad labeled “after” used brand persistence and results in an average lift in all branding metrics of 86 percent.

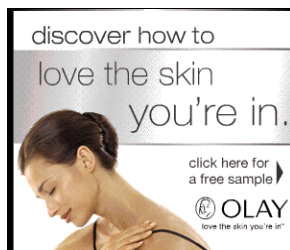
Figure 1



## 3) Use Simple Iconic Message

Consider for a moment how your consumer is using the Internet. Are they using it to actively peruse for relevant content to address specific interests or needs? Are they using it to communicate with others via email or instant messaging? Are they playing games? Are they searching to buy something specific? Now ask yourself, what must your ad do to be visible and understood in each of the relevant contexts for your consumer? A common thread in each of these situations is the active control the consumer exerts over the media. And, in such a context, the advertisement must convey the message simply and quickly to be seen and understood by your consumer. The use of straight-forward iconic imagery and concise messaging is the key. What makes for an iconic visual message to the consumer?

Figure 2



People say, “a picture is worth a thousand words” but for iconic imagery, the marketer should aim for the picture to capture the essence of a singular concept. If the ad is intended to reinforce or shape perceptions, a visual message should communicate the essence of the brand promise. Together the logo and the image should be easily understood at a glance. Consider the image of woman used as an icon in Figure 2. This conveys Olay’s straightforward promise of beauty. For McDonald’s it is a delicious image of the food. For a children’s toy company it is the child playing happily with a toy. Yes, the image may imply more, but the core concepts should be clear at a glance.

It is tempting to use flash animation to create a television like advertisement online, but narratives do not work when consumers’ attention is divided. Using the animation to tell a more complicated story can add too many elements for the consumer to comprehend resulting in less retention of the ad message. Narratives are powerful, but narratives should be reserved for specific online ad formats such as interstitials, gateways, and over the page ad units. Animation in banner, skyscraper or box ads should be used to focus attention rather than to tell a story.

**TIP:**

After completing the ad development, review it and remove any extraneous elements to limit the clutter a consumer is faced with. For example, the words “Love the skin you’re in” communicate the same message as “Discover how to love the skin you’re in”

## 4) Consider The Format

Finding the best format for each message creates a diverse online campaign which leverages many different types of media placements.

The most common ad formats are banners and ad boxes within the context of a text web page. These work well for many situations. When a more complicated message is necessary, such as the introduction of a new product or repositioning an existing brand, there are online ad formats such as interstitial, gateway, and over the page units, which allow for narratives. We recommend keeping the animation to 5 seconds or less. The interstitial and over the page ad formats capture more of the viewer's undivided attention, allowing for a more complicated message to be effectively communicated.

Page skins like the Coca-Cola skin shown in Figure 3 are effective at reminding or reinforcing mechanisms in that they can raise the salience of a specific brand or perception by using imagery that the consumer is already familiar with.

Text links are also useful for some categories where the consumer is highly targeted and actively seeking the specific information you are offering (such as keyword buys). The text should focus on the product combined with primary consumer motivators such price or availability.

Figure 3



## 5) Optimize Creative

Many of the tips in this paper should help you develop effective creative, but pre testing should be part of every creative process.

Pre-testing the creative allows you to optimize around the results. Marketing Evolution has built in a creative testing process to all our major research efforts in order to eliminate ill performing ads. This simple seven day process will ensure that effective ads are being used.

Why bother? Of the past five XMOS studies where creative tests were employed, we saw only one advertiser that had all of their concepts positively influence purchase intent. Two of the five had some ads that were effective and others that were not, which would have diluted the effect of the overall campaign. The remaining two had ads that would have failed in the market place had they not gone back to the drawing board and developed more effective creative based on the learnings from the test. Wouldn't you want to optimize your creative before you spend tens or hundreds of thousands of dollars in media delivery?

Figure 4

		Imps (M)	Brand Performance	Contribution		Imps (M)	Brand Performance	Contribution
1.		10.0	-15.9%	(1.59)	Creative 1	--	--	--
2.		10.0	13.8%	1.38	Creative 2	15.0	13.8%	2.07
		10.0	11.3%	1.13	Creative 3	15.0	11.3%	1.70
	total	30.0		<b>0.92</b>	Total	30.0		<b>3.77</b>

Source: InsightExpress, 2004

## TIP:

When building ads we become very absorbed in the process, but a live real-world online creative test is an easy way to get objective perspective and ensure the success of a campaign. There are other creative testing approaches such as simulated web pages, which Insight Express uses. Figure 4 is an example of three executions that were pre-tested by Insight Express. In this case the first banner negatively impacted brand performance whereas the other two contributed to positive brand performance. Eliminating the first ad significantly increased the contribution of the campaign. This 310% increase in contribution using the same media budget is a vivid example of the economic value of better creative.

## Conclusions:

The five guidelines...

- (1) Know the purpose of your campaign and the psychological mechanism of your ad,
- (2) Apply Brand Mark Persistently,
- (3) Use Simple Iconic Message,
- (4) Consider the Format, and
- (5) Optimize Creative

... are keys to success in online advertising. They are platinum rules that will help ensure consistent platinum results. Advertising is a process of testing, learning and applying the insight. Or, as we say at Marketing Evolution, "Test, Learn, Evolve."