



Perfect in Print

Spending big bucks on advertising won't guarantee success in promoting your stallion, service or product. It is knowing how to best spend your promotional dollars that will make a difference on your bottom line.

By Jill J. Dunkel

Advertising. It's a vital part of any business, and, done well, can bring in and maintain a thriving client base. Done poorly, it can do just the opposite.

Advertising can be expensive—photo shoots, logo design and ad design all add up. That is why it is important that you know what makes an effective ad and get the most for your investment.

Determine Your Goals

To create an effective advertisement, you must first decide exactly what you hope to achieve. Sure, you want to drive business to your horse or product, but what makes your product unique?

"Everybody is a little different and may not have the same idea in mind," says Cam Esick of the Pacific Range Design Group in Clements, California. "Perhaps a stallion owner wants to generate business by focusing on his stallion's bloodline, or maybe it's the personal touch the owner provides that will bring his customers back. Maybe a leg win will catch the reader's eye, or the gene personality the horse passes on to his offspring is important in marketing the horse."

Donna Huff Owen of Brainstorm Creative Group, in Meridian, Mississippi, adds "It's really critical to know your objective. It seems so simple, but it's very important to know just what you're trying to achieve."

Esick says it's also important to understand where your product or horse fits in the market you are targeting. If you own a horse that excels in a small niche market, decide how you can broaden your appeal to more people.

"Create a reputation for yourself," she says. "This may not be the best stallion or only horse you own. Get more bang for your buck by developing some self exposure."

Photography, Photography, Photography!

Never, ever skip on good photography. That is the advice of a host of graphic designers who specialize in equine advertising.

"An ad is only as good as the elements in it," says Debbie Roberts of Spurs Equine Marketing and Promotions, based in Tualatin, Oregon.

Mandy Brumley of Brumley Management Group in Phoenix, Arizona, agrees.

"The entire ad depends on a good photo," she says. "It's not going to benefit your program or your horse if the photos are blurry, ears are cut off, if the resolution is bad, or if the horse is standing incorrectly. The quality of your images will make the ad."

G. G. Park of Park Place Enterprises in Fort Worth, Texas, advises not simply going in your backyard and taking a picture of your horse.

"You want a professionally taken photograph," Park says. "Hire a pro. It's great if you can plan well enough in advance to have someone come for the day and take enough pictures for several ads. That way it's more cost effective. You might get enough pictures for a couple years' worth of ads."

And remember that, thanks to shipped semen, many more owners may never see your stallion in person.

"Make sure he looks his best in your promotional materials," says Dennis Taylor of Big Country Communications in Klamath Falls, Oregon. "The horse should look like he's walking into a halter class.



(Above left) Even horse shows can utilize a brand in their advertising. Each year, an artist provides a colorful painting for Raining By The Bay in Woodside, California, and the show has become known for this colorful artwork.

(Right) This ad not only identifies the show based on its brand identity of the painting and bright colors, but it also incorporates important show information in blue and black boxes. The colored boxes set the text apart, which allows for a large amount of text without appearing cluttered.

If not, you're defeating the purpose and wasting your money."

Utilize different poses and backgrounds during a photo session. Take a good conformation shot, a head shot, pictures of your horse working, pictures saddled and unsaddled, and possibly pictures of him running free in the pasture.

"Pay attention to your background," advises Taylor. "Don't take pictures in the winter unless you absolutely have to. Your horse and your background don't look as good. The light is not as good, either."

"Plan ahead. Take pictures for next year's breeding season in June or July. The horses look good and you have the time to do it. Breeding season is over, and, typically, photographers and graphic design agencies are not as busy and have more time to work on your product."

If winter is your only opportunity to take pictures of your horse, Roberts suggests using an action picture from a show. If you need a conformation shot in the winter, stand the horse on blacktop with a plain background behind him.

"Then I can add a different background to the photo," Roberts says. "But it is very hard to take a horse out of a photo when he's standing in grass or in front of a background with a lot going on."

Graphic designers can do a lot with photography, but can't work miracles, points out Sally Harrison of Sally Harrison Equine Photography and Advertising in Fort Worth, Texas.

"In this day and age, people think you can do anything," she says. "We can adjust for color and contrast to a certain point, but we can't take little tiny pictures, especially those with the word 'PROOF' across it, and blow it up for an ad."

Which brings us to a very important point—beware of copyright



(Above left) This well-done black and white ad uses bullet points to draw the eye down the page to the important information.

(Right) Simplicity, a catchy headline and a large amount of white space make this ad stand out in a magazine.

infringement. Know what rights you have to use the photograph. Ask the photographer if your picture purchase includes permission to use the photograph in your print ads and on your Web site.

"Who owns the photograph? Where did you get your picture from?" asks Curtis Matthews, director of operations with Cowboy Publishing Group. "If there's a sticker on the front or the back of the photograph, we will have to follow up with questions to protect the integrity of the photographer."

And, says Essick, if your budget doesn't allow for a professional photographer, at least get some help.

"Think about your photography," she says. "Take a friend out there and have him help you. It's not a one-man job. Try to mimic good photography. Pay attention to details."

Beyond the Image?

A photo may draw readers into an ad, but other elements of a print ad are also important.

"Utilize well-written copy," says Park. "A well thought-out message is what you're going for. Don't try to tell them everything about your business in one ad."

"Well-written copy can grab someone's attention. Be fresh and new; don't reuse what's in other ads."

Park also advises reading the copy several times.

"Read it as if you know nothing about your operation or program and see if it makes sense," she says. "Don't assume your readers already know you in the industry. You could get the new guy who doesn't know."

Be informative with your text, however, don't let your ad be text heavy.

"I'm a firm believer that you can put way too much text in an ad," says Roberts. "Simplicity is a lot better. Give the key information, then provide contact numbers or Web sites. Give them just enough so they want to call. Too much text muddies up an ad."

Headlines are also very important. Pay attention to how that ad is going to look in a publication, and utilize elements—such as a catchy



Never underestimate the power of good photos. Images such as the one above, in which the horse's ears are cut off and its feet are not correctly placed, can have a negative effect in advertising. A more positive image, such as the photo on the right, properly shows the horse's expression and conformation.



or uniquely placed headline—to make your ad stand out.

Additionally, when combining the visual elements together to form an ad, don't overuse graphic effects.

"Don't try to use every graphic feature and special effect that is available in the software," says Park. "It's too much going on and you don't know where to look."

"Create a focal point for a reader's eye to grab."

Brand Your Product

As you piece the elements of your ad together, decide how readers will know the ad is yours.

"Create consistency in your advertising," says Harrison. "Stick with a look. That look can be tweaked or updated, but maintain your ranch logo, certain colors or a name logo for a horse. Your farm or stallion should be easily identified when a reader is flipping the page."

Maintaining a consistent look also creates a presence of your horse or product.

"Psychologically, by keeping the same look, people unconsciously associate your ad with you and your horses," explains Harrison.

"If you don't have a logo to go on each ad, and to place on business cards, caps, jackets, and other items, create one," says Brumley. "Keep



Logos achieve name recognition. After they are used in magazine ads, logos can also contribute to an advertising campaign on items such as jackets and caps.

with it. Don't change the color of the logo, and place the logo in a similar location on every ad. If you can't be identified, customers get frustrated and move on."

Consistency, however, doesn't mean you can't change up your ads. "I encourage clients to change up their advertising and keep it fresh," says Roberts. "I don't recommend clients run the same ad three months in a row. I think two months is better. But keep your general theme for name and logo recognition. You want everyone to know who you are when readers see your ads."

On the other hand, experts don't suggest a new ad each month. "You don't have to change the ad every time," says Huff Owen. "Analyze the situation. Does the ad still make sense for what you're pushing and the time of year? Everyone didn't see the ad the first time."

Also consider your target audience and the timing of your message when you place your ads. For example, if you are promoting a stallion, get your ads out in November and December, when potential customers begin assessing their breeding options. But if you're on a limited budget, don't start advertising until the breeding season. You want your ads to be seen when breeding contracts are mailed out.

Knowing your target audience is also important in determining what publication to advertise in.

"Pick where it's best to spend your advertising dollars," Essick says. "Go for bigger ads in some magazines, but consider a business card ad in the back of other publications. That keeps your product in the public eye."

Promoting Sales, Facilities and Shows

Auctioneer Dave Hammond of Shingle Springs, California, utilizes print advertising to announce upcoming horse sales.

"I start with an announcement ad," Hammond explains. "Then, closer to the sale, I plan ads that feature specific sale horses. I also encourage consignors to advertise their sale horses themselves. However, promoting the sale of a large number of horses can lead to a text-heavy ad.

"I aim for a simple but elegant ad. I use the minimum amount of information needed to bring a reader to another information source, such as my Web site. You only have a second or two of the reader's time. Later, a reader might use the ad as a reference source, for a phone number, a date or the Web site."

Hammond also suggests good photos for sale horses.

"You want the right look in photos, not a horse standing there at a bad angle," he says. "It's up to the consignors to help themselves by

Make Your Effort Count!

In the world of graphic design, there are certain specifications that need to be met for an advertisement to print properly. Failure to meet these specifications can result in a poor-quality ad, an unhappy customer and time wasted.

If you hire a professional designer to build your advertisement, chances are they are familiar with the proper format and file types. However, if you plan to design an ad yourself, here are a few tips from Curtis Matthews, director of operations at Cowboy Publishing Group in Fort Worth, Texas, (the home of Performance Horse).

- The resolution of photographs should be 300 dpi. The dpi (or dots per inch) refers to how many pixels make up your photograph. The more pixels, the sharper the image.

- Logos or photographs pulled from a Web site are likely not print-friendly. Most Web sites optimize their photographs to 72 dpi, and photographs need to be 300 dpi for quality printing. Occasionally, companies or photographers will provide a link to high-resolution documents or a media kit on their Web site.

- If a camera shoots a 4-by-5-inch, 300 dpi image, the photo will print well at that size. However, if the 4-by-5-inch, 300 dpi image is enlarged to an 8-by-10, the photo is then at 150 dpi. (There are fewer pixels per inch now that it is enlarged.) It now fails the basic criteria for an ad and will appear out of focus or look like a low-resolution picture when printed.

Hint: When using a digital camera, take all pictures on the largest file setting possible for your camera to increase the resolution of the images. This will improve the likelihood the photographs can be enlarged.

- Color formats should be CMYK for a color ad, or grayscale for a black and white ad. Digital photographs are typically RGB and should be converted to CMYK for printing.

- Preferred file formats are PDF and TIFF documents. The more camera-ready an ad is, the better, especially if you're aiming for a camera-ready discount. Other file formats accepted by Cowboy Publishing are Quark Xpress, InDesign and Adobe Illustrator. Programs that might be acceptable include Corel Draw and Freehand, but the art department needs to be notified ahead of time for preferred settings.

- Files that are not acceptable include: Microsoft Publisher, Microsoft Word, Excel, or Power Point. Those files cannot go directly into the magazine. However, elements provided in those files can be used to rebuild the ad by the Cowboy Publishing art department.

- Ideally, embed all fonts in the ad. PostScript fonts are preferred and can be printed with nearly a 100 percent success rate. If the font is embedded, TrueType fonts can also work. The art department is happy to help you adjust your Distiller settings so that the fonts will be embedded in the ad.

having their horse in good condition and making sure their photos show their horse equal to or better than the industry standards. People who are successful at selling horses, whether it's at an auction or private treaty, promote their horses."

If you're trying to draw attention to your facility, tell readers what your place has to offer, suggests Pam Gustin of By Design in Godley, Texas.

"Whether it's your stalls, R.V. hookups, or multiple arenas, show

your facility in your ad," she says. "A good picture of the facility can really enhance the ad."

Gustin also recommends promoting an event several months ahead.

"If there is an entry deadline, get an ad a couple of issues prior to the deadline to give riders multiple opportunities to enter your show," she says.

Utilize Sales Reps

Not sure where to start? Your advertising sales representative is a great place to begin. Some publications will even create your ad for you at no extra cost.

"Get advice," says Essick. "If you can't afford to hire someone to do it all, talk to your sales rep for ideas and suggestions."

Understand the rates you are quoted for various advertising options. If you plan on running several ads, check into six-time and 12-time rates, and camera-ready discounts.

"Frequency rates can get you a 10 to 15 percent discount," says Gustin. "Also, check into discounts for camera-ready ads. Many companies offer a discount if your ad arrives ready for printing."

If this is your first outing in the world of advertising, start looking at ads. Find things you like and don't like. Tear those pages out and send them to your designer, whether it's an agency or the magazine's art department.

"If the client has an ad they like, or if they want to sketch something out on a cocktail napkin, send it," says Matthews. "We always like suggestions because knowing what their expectations are helps us get started."

Tie It All Together

"Good print advertising is important, but you need good follow-up information," says Taylor. "When an ad generates a phone call, be prepared with other information to send that potential client. A well done Web site is very important today."

Utilizing a Web site allows a potential customer the chance to get more information about your horse or product, without cluttering a print ad.


"Hit the highlights in your ad and refer people to your Web site," says Harrison. "If you don't have one, get one. There, multiple photos, wins, information on successful offspring, etc. can seal the deal."

And be certain that your ad gives all the possible ways a potential client can get in touch with you.

"Sometimes, advertisers don't give enough contact information, whether it's a cell phone number, e-mail address or Web site," says Matthews. "Advertising can generate contacts, but if you're not reachable, you've defeated the purpose. If you list only one phone number in an ad, but you're not by that phone most of the time, perhaps it would be better to list a cell phone number in the ad."

A good DVD is another way to promote a horse.

"It can show a horse working," says Taylor. "You can't run a good-looking ad and be effective without a complete promotional program."

The world of advertising has changed dramatically in the last 15 years. No one ever said campaigning a horse or product was cheap or easy, but consider everything you've invested thus far. Proper promotion could create a stellar return on your investment. 



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