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SPECIAL REPORT

How Much Advertising Is Enough? Impact, Reach, Continuity & Frequency

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HOW MUCH ADVERTISING IS ENOUGH? Impact, Reach, Continuity & Frequency

The Question

When discussing the subject of how much advertising is enough, the question is: will an advertiser get better results if he or she reaches more people a few times or fewer people more times?

This is a critically important question because, since most business owners have a limited budget available with which to implement an advertising campaign, the answer to the reach versus frequency question dictates how many media will be purchased, the length of time the advertising will run and how the advertising campaign will be scheduled.

If you decide in favor of high frequency you'll run your ads on fewer media over a shorter time period. If you opt for reach you'll run on more media over a longer time frame.

Media Buyers

By the early '80's most ad agency media buyers and sales reps had begun advocating *frequency* over *reach*. It's imperative, they say, to reach consumers a minimum of three times with any advertising message in a given time period. In the last few years that time period has been identified as one week thanks to the mistaken theory that suggests sleep erases short term memory every seven days.

Why Three Times?

The need for the threshold to be three exposures was based on research conducted by Herbert Krugman, an employee of General Electric. Krugman reported that his research proved advertising 'works' when consumers ask:

1. What is it that's being advertised?
2. Why should I care about the product or service being advertised?
- 3) And are then reminded, via advertising, of the product or service when they're ready to make a purchase ('recency').

Since there are three steps in Krugman's process perhaps it's possible to misinterpret his research to mean "three exposures" to an advertisement is required if advertising is to 'work.'

The Problem

The problem with the "three exposure" interpretation of Krugman's research is that he never said three physical exposures to an advertisement was required. Krugman did say: "Advertising needs frequency, because, like a product sitting on the shelf, you never know when the consumer is going to be looking for you, so you have to rent the shelf space all the time."

But, published reports of Krugman's later conversations and the speeches he gave regarding the above quote have him saying the word 'presence' would have been a better choice of word than 'frequency.' The quote above then, would read: "Advertising needs presence, because, like a product sitting on the shelf, you never know when the consumer is going to be looking for you, so you have to rent the shelf space all the time."

Cannon, Leckenby and Abernethy referred to a 1986 study by Cannon and Goldring in a Wayne State University Department of Marketing Workshop Paper delivered in January 2001:

"Krugman's theory did not necessarily imply a need for three, or even two, physical advertising exposures, but only a series of mental steps in message processing. These might take place in conjunction with a series of advertising exposures, in response to a single exposure, or perhaps be triggered by a single exposure, but take place in the theater of one's mind at some other time and place."

The Problem Compounded

The three exposure theory seemed to be reinforced by a later study conducted by Colin McDonald suggesting "a single advertising exposure

had no effect on sales.” But John Philip Jones (*When Ads Work*), when analyzing the McDonald study, concluded McDonald’s result was based on a sample “indeed too small to permit McDonald to differentiate between the effective and ineffective campaigns.” In fact, McDonald himself wrote a follow-up paper to his initial research saying his study included too few participants (there were eight) to be taken seriously. Further, McDonald disputed the idea that his research ever supported the value of frequency.

Why the Frequency Fallacy Survives

The idea that frequency is somehow critical to effective advertising is convenient for advertising agency management and media sales people. There’s enough of what appears to be evidence to justify the approach. It’s easy to explain to business owners. And the number of ads needed can be quickly determined via a simple formula.

As reported in the Wayne State paper: “Agencies needed a simple approach that could be implemented by relatively low-level planning staffers...The practice of effective frequency planning presents an enormous paradox. On one hand, research suggests that it is used by the majority of media planners. On the other hand, it also suggests that the method makes little sense.”

Impact, Reach, Continuity and Effective Frequency

Of course, you’re best served by developing an *impactful* message coupled with an advertising schedule that *reaches* as many members of your target market as possible *continuously* and with *effective frequency*. Let’s consider impact, reach, continuity and effective frequency one concept at a time.

Impact

Communicating a message that has *Impact* is critical to successful advertising. An impactful message answers three critical questions every consumer asks when considering making a purchase:

- 1) Why should I buy this product or service from you?
- 2) Why should I believe what you say?
- 3) Why should I buy from you today?

After seeing or hearing the advertisement one time the consumer should be able to complete the following sentence: I could have bought this from (competitor), but I bought it from (advertiser), and paid more, because (advertiser's competitive advantage, a consumer-desired benefit not offered by any competitors), and I bought from (advertiser) today because (call-to-action).

If your ad does not clearly communicate the consumer-desired advantage only you offer, regardless of how creative you think the ad is, it has failed to differentiate you from your competition and you're selling a commodity. Save your money.

If a competitor can remove your name from the advertisement and replace it with his, and the benefit-promise in the ad is still valid, your ad has failed to differentiate you from your competition and you're selling a commodity. Save your money.

If, after seeing or hearing the ad, the consumer asks "So what? Why should I care?" the ad has failed to motivate the now buyer to buy from you today and has failed to motivate the future buyer to remember to buy from you when he or she is in the market for your product or service. Save your money.

Reach

A percentage of the market is going to buy what you sell from somebody today, tomorrow and every day thereafter. The problem is, you don't know who the buyers are. That's why it's important to *reach* as many people as possible in your target market with an impactful message. You want as many potential buyers as possible to be exposed to your impactful message.

Rosser Reeves (*Reality in Advertising*) asks: "Is it better to reach a smaller audience, yet reach it more times? Or is it better to reach a bigger audience – yet reach it less often? The answer, of course, is – buy dispersion" (reach)... "The ideal dispersion, of course, would be to reach 100% of the people" in the target market "and repeat with as much frequency as the budget will permit." Reeves adds, for dispersion to work, the advertiser must be using "Unique Selling Proposition copy, sharply focused, run unchanged, often repetitive . . ." In other words, your advertising must consist of high impact messages presenting a consumer-

desired benefit only you can claim to offer, or that only you are smart enough to offer.

Continuity

Consider once again Krugman’s statement: “...you never know when the consumer is going to be looking for you, so you have to rent the shelf space all the time.”

Advertising does have a greater impact on a consumer that is currently in the market and that is ready to buy the advertised product or service. One impactful message seen or heard by a consumer when that consumer is ready to purchase is more effective than exposure to a number of commercials at a time when the consumer has no interest in the product or service.

Effective Frequency

How much frequency is enough? The chart below provides important insight that will help you make that determination.

Marketing Factors	Copy Factors	Media Factors
Established brands (-) High market share (-) Dominant brand in market (-) High brand loyalty (-) Long purchase cycle (-) Product used daily (+) Heavy spending category (+) Special targets (+)	Complex copy (+) Unique copy (-) New copy (+) Image copy (+) Many kinds of messages (+) High copy wear out (-) Small ad units (+)	High Clutter (+) Compatible environment (+) High attentiveness (-) Pulsed or flighted (+) Few media used (-) Repeated exposure (-)

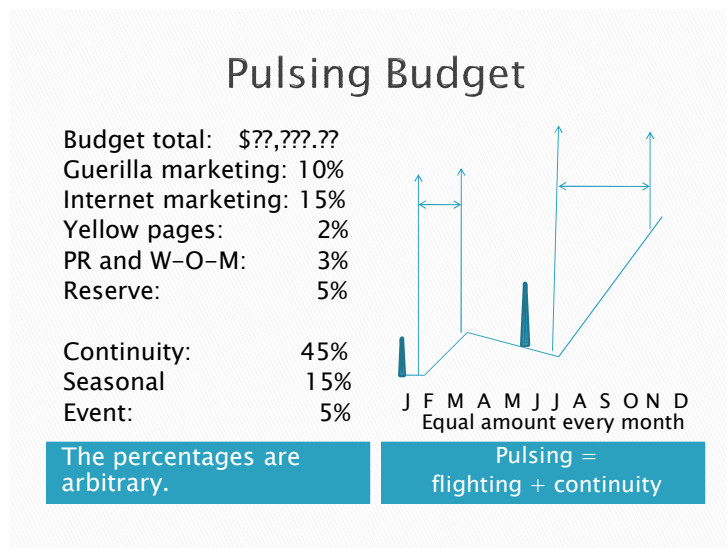
Chart adapted from Joseph W. Ostrow, “Setting Effective Frequency Levels,” *Effective Frequency, the State of the Art...* New York: Advertising Research Foundation, Key Issues Workshop, 1982, pp. 89-102

More frequency (+) is required, for example, when your message is complex and/or new. Less frequency (-) is required if you are the dominant brand in the market and enjoy high brand loyalty.

The Pulsing Schedule

The chart below presents an advertising schedule that distributes your budget over a period of a year. It couples the need for continuity with the need for increased frequency when more people are in the market to

purchase your product or service because of the season or because you are hosting an event such as your anniversary sale or inventory clearance.



As indicated, the percentage allocation suggested is arbitrary. You may want to use less budget for guerilla marketing. Or you may want to use a larger percentage of your budget to promote events.

Example

Let's assume your annual marketing budget is \$25,000 and you use the example percentages suggested in the chart.

35%, or \$8,750, will be dispersed as follows:

- Guerrilla Marketing, 10% or \$2,500
- Internet Marketing, 15% or \$3,750
- Yellow Pages, 2% or \$500
- PR & Word-of-Mouth, 3% or \$750
- Reserve (to be used when an unexpected opportunity arises), 5% or \$1,250

65%, or \$16,250, will be dispersed as follows:

- Continuity, 45% or \$11,250 (\$937.50 each month)
- Seasonally, 15% or \$3,750 (represented by the vertical and horizontal arrows; the season with the greatest potential getting the largest share of the increased budget)

- Events, 5% or \$1,250 (represented by the short, dark triangles, with the most important event getting the largest share of the budget if you host more than one event a year).

Conclusion

Create a high impact message by understanding what your consumers truly desire when they buy your product or service. I've written Your Phrase that Pays, a 114-page workbook detailing how to do highly effective, no-cost, easy to accomplish consumer research to help you do exactly that.

Replace any concept you may have of the value of 'high frequency' with the concepts of consistency, effective frequency and recency. Schedule your marketing budget to achieve continuous reach of as many members of your target market as possible consistently, allocating more dollars to your marketing effort when more people are ready to buy what you sell because of the season or because you are hosting an event.

Thank you for your interest in this Special Report. Have a productive day!

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Mark Dahl owns Accountable MARKeting, a copywriting firm located in Columbia, MO. Mark has 30+ years of marketing experience, including 20 years of national travel, helping small business owners across the country create advertising that works. For a copywriting quote call mark at 573-443-8610. Mark's workbook, Your Phrase that Pays, A How-To-Advertise Workbook for the Small Business Owner that Demands Results, is available as an E-book at www.yourphrasethatpays.com, You can order a hard copy from Mark by calling: 573-443-8610 in Columbia, MO or 800-324-4804 toll free. Mark's E-mail address is mark@accountablemarketing.com. His mailing address is Accountable MARKeting, PO Box 7434, Columbia, MO 65205