



25 Silly – But True! – Advertising Rules You Need to Know

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The field of advertising is traditionally known as a haven for “creative types.” And those types often come up with some pretty creative “rules” for doing business. Some of the rules may seem pretty silly, but they work. And there’s nothing silly about that.

Following are “25 Silly (but True!) Advertising Rules For Improving Your Sales.”

1. **If you’ve included a list of things in your copy**, you should use an odd number - 3,5,7, etc., Just as when arranging pictures on a wall, asymmetry attracts the eye.
2. **When you’re doing a mailing (the “old-fashioned” way)**, a first-class stamp will out-pull metered or bulk mail, especially when mailing in a typical, #10, business-style envelope. The letter is more likely to get opened when it has the appearance of “legitimate” mail.
3. **Certain colors are more effective** - or have a certain kind of impact - on customers. Red suggests action and immediacy. Yellow can have the same effect. Blue and green are “calm” colors - effective in a company brochure where you want to establish an image, not so effective when you’re looking for action or response.
4. **When pricing your products**, don’t round the numbers. Studies continue to show that consumers respond better to a price like \$19.98, for instance, than they would to \$20.00.
5. **Always include a “P.S.” in a sales-letter**, even an email blast. Why? Next to the headline/subject line, it’s the most-read and an opportunity to re-state your offer in clear, compelling terms.
6. **Include three options on any response vehicle** – “yes,” “no,” and “maybe.” Or some variation thereof. “Maybe” responses help you identify future prospects. In addition, the multiple options have been shown to increase orders. An added benefit? If you’re using

a rented list, even the responses that come back marketed “no” or “maybe” can be added to your own database for future prospecting.

7. **If you print a picture, include a caption.** A picture may be “worth 1000 words,” but it helps to add ten to twenty of your own! Tie the caption to your sales message.
8. **Avoid humor.** Humor is very personal - what one person thinks is funny, another may not. When you use humor, you also risk offending someone; it’s generally not worth the risk.
9. **Never use sans serif type** (the kind of type without the “feet”) for body copy. It’s more difficult to read. The serifs help to pull the eye naturally through the copy.
10. **Don’t try to sell more than one thing at a time.** The less complicated your offer, the greater the likelihood that you’ll get a prospect to make a “yes” decision. Asking the prospect to choose between too many options creates confusion and may result in a “no-decision” decision.
11. **The phrase “free gift” may be redundant, but it works.** “Free” is, without a doubt, the most powerful word in the copywriter’s arsenal. Try it.
12. **A large, or irregularly shaped, direct mail piece will get results.** It stands out from the rest of the mail and cries out to be “looked at.” Even better, a three-dimensional, bulky mailer. Prospects can’t help but open a package that obviously has “something in it.”
13. **When you’re composing a headline, always include the word “you.”** It helps to answer customers’ number one question of “what’s in it for me?”
14. **Do you market through a “not-for-profit” business? Watch your packaging.** A package, direct mail piece, or web design that looks too “expensive” can turn prospects off. The same is true when promoting sale or low-ticket items. Your design/approach should align with your brand.
15. **Tell customers specifically what to do.** Provide step-by-step instructions for your customers. You won’t be “insulting,” you’ll be helpful. Customers are busy people. The more direct guidance you can provide them, the more likely you are to receive a response.
16. **Be careful about asking questions in your headlines/subject lines.** If the customer can answer the question “no,” they’re not likely to keep reading. For instance, “Wouldn’t you like to learn about 150 ways to make a meatloaf?” A customer could easily respond, “no,” and throw your piece in the circular - or junk mail - file.
17. **When sending “traditional” direct mail, letter mailings,** “window” envelopes - where the name and address show a clear, glassine window - out-pull closed envelopes.

18. **If you're sending a mailing out first class, print "first class" on the envelope.** It emphasizes the importance of what's inside.
19. **Set a "deadline" for response.** "Order before January 1 to take advantage of this offer." A deadline creates a sense of urgency and gives the impression that if the customer doesn't order now, s/he may not have another chance. Make sure your internal order entry people understand that the "deadline" is in name only - you don't want them turning down orders that come in "late."
20. **Pre-address your order form with not only your address,** but the customer's name and address as well. Anything you can do to make it easier to order will increase your response.
21. **Speaking of which...when soliciting online orders,** make sure you've asked an "outsider" to walk through your online order process. Anything that causes a prospect to "pause," go back or that creates frustration can mean a lost sale. The beauty of online advertising is its measurability. Make sure you understand - and use! - your analytics to continually improve.
22. **Don't use all upper case letters in headlines, or over use it in body copy.** It may give a bold impression, but it's too difficult to read (and, in the digital world, it's considered "shouting").
23. **If you market through a catalog, place a price tag on that catalog.** It creates a sense of "value" for the customer who receives one "free" in the mail or is handed one by one of your sales staff.
24. **Always use names with testimonials.** If possible, include a company name and a city. The ultimate? Include a photograph. The more you can do to make the testimonial-giver "real" to your prospective customers, the more impact the testimonial will have.
25. **Your best customers are your best customers.** Silly, but true. The people who have purchased from you in the past, are the people who are most likely to purchase from you in the future. Never forget it.

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