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# 5 tips for creating effective newspaper ads

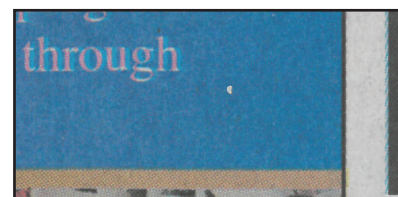
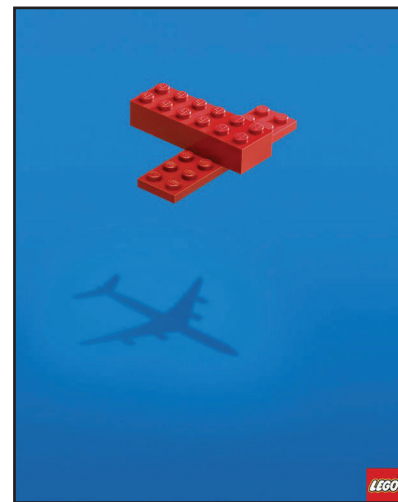
Whether your business is new to print advertising in general, or newspaper advertising in particular, it's a good idea to review some basic principles to make sure you're getting the most from your advertising dollars.

## 1 Keep it simple

This first point is the most important, and applies to many aspects of your ad design, from copy to type to imagery. Focus on a single message. There is a temptation, especially with larger ads, to fill up the page with bullet point after bullet point hailing the virtues of your business or organization. Focus on one product, one event, or one service. If you're running a branding campaign, stick to a simple but coherent message.

This message can be delivered through copy, imagery, or a combination of the two, but always be wary of overcomplicating your message. If your ad is going to be copy-driven, be sure to write a concise, attention-grabbing headline, and keep the rest of your copy (if there is any) brief.

If you're using an image, make sure it is clear,



and will reproduce well in print. Newspapers achieve color images through what's called a "four-color process." Basic colors (cyan, magenta, yellow and black) are combined to make almost any color imaginable. Each base color is printed separately with a "plate," which must be aligned perfectly with the other colors to create clear images. This is called "registration." If registration is off by the slightest amount, images can appear slightly blurry. For this reason, many newspapers warn against printing "knockout" text — light colors on dark backgrounds — especially at smaller sizes, as this may make text unreadable.

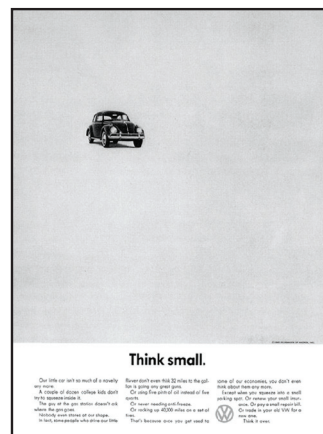
Many newspaper ads can have a great impact with no image at all, so don't be afraid to experiment and be bold.

## 2 White and negative space

Although contemporary publications have begun bucking this trend, newspapers are typically full of columns of dense text and photographs, laid out as tightly as possible for efficient printing. One of the fastest ways to stand out in the crowd, and make sure your message can be seen, is to use a generous amount of white space. From the start, this will make your ad more visible to readers.

Once eyes are drawn to your ad, you can lead them through the art with careful placement of images and/or copy. Nothing is more legible than black text on white paper (there's a reason books and newspapers have been doing it for centuries), and getting audiences to read your message is the first step towards getting them to understand it. This isn't to say you should fear experimenting with other combinations of images and text, but some legibility is always sacrificed when printing text on a colored background, gradient, or image.

White space that is not literally white is also some-



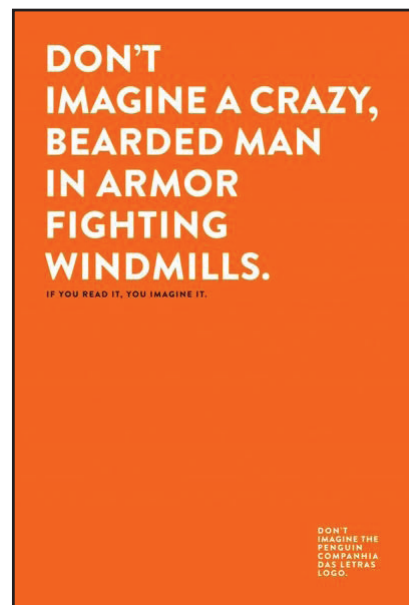
times referred to as “negative space.” Whether the open spaces in your ad are white, a solid color, or a background image, it’s important to allow room for elements of the design to breathe, to increase legibility, and lend weight to your message. A “clean” design with copious amounts of negative space will look more sophisticated and professional, giving your advertisement an air of authority.

## 3 Use clear typography

With digital typography, there is such an abundance of fonts available for designers to use that it can be overwhelming. While you may gravitate towards a more “unique” font to make your organization stand out, sometimes this can have the opposite effect. A font that seems unique could actually be overused, trendy, and kitschy. There are times when fonts such as these, typically referred to as “display” fonts, are appropriate to use, but it’s best to leave that determination up to a professional designer.

In most situations, particularly with print design, it is best to use large and clear type for headlines. These may be serif fonts (fonts with feet, or little adornments on the ends of letters), or sans-serif fonts (“plain” fonts, or fonts without any decoration).

Sans serif fonts can appear more modern and friendly, while serif fonts may appear more elegant and authoritative. Choose the best font for your brand’s voice. Ideally, look for one that is from a font family containing many different weights and styles, as this will lend flexibility to a variety of designs later on, while maintaining brand consistency. Larger font families also



tend to be professionally designed (many, in fact, have the “pro” in the name as they are intended for use by professionals), and the care that went into the design of the font will come through in the final ad.

Pay attention to font weight (light, regular, medium, semibold, bold, heavy are some examples of font weight classifications) as they relate to your design. If you are printing large text on a white background, you may be free to use a lightweight, sans serif font. On a solid color background, however, this text could vanish into the background, and it may be wiser to use a bold face. Similarly, the small serifs on some fonts can disappear when knocked out.

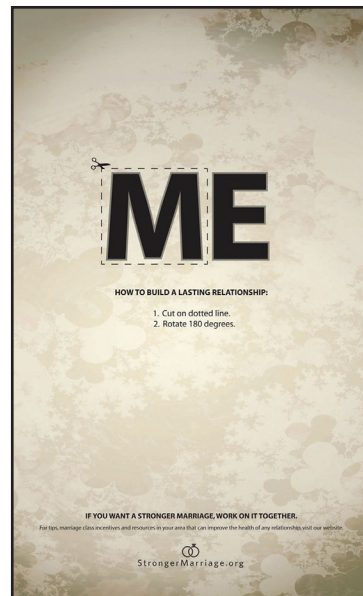
Don't go crazy. Some designs will be well served by using a single font family. Some will require two — sometimes contrasting serif and sans serif types can be used to good effect. Only in rare circumstances, and usually to achieve a certain effect, should more than three fonts be used in one design.

## 4 Be aware of the medium

It may seem obvious, but newspapers are printed on paper, not on a screen. A design that looks great on a screen may reproduce differently in the paper, as a result of the four-color process or other technical aspects of printing. Most designs will appear darker in print than they do on a screen, due to a number of factors, such as the use of subtractive color (inks blended to make colors on a page) as opposed to additive color (light mixed through pixels on a screen), the color of the paper, etc.

Use the fact that your ad is printed on paper to your benefit. Potential customers will have the

opportunity to interact, both visually and physically, with your advertisement, so try to take advantage of

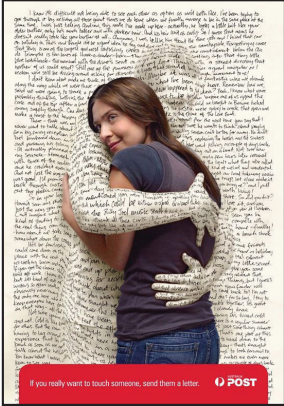


this format. This can be done creatively, either by playing on the nature of newspapers having a certain format (columns densely populated with text), or by encouraging readers to cut out, write on, or otherwise interact with the advertisement. Don't necessarily take a digital campaign and put it in a print format when you can greatly increase the impact of your ad by doing something different.

# 5 Stand out from the crowd

Perhaps most importantly, remember to do your research and stand out from the crowd. See what your competitors are doing in print advertising, and see what you can learn from them, and what you feel you can improve upon. Watch what national brands in your field are doing that you can emulate or innovate upon. Remember to be original. You might one day open up a paper to see all your competitors using copious white space, clean typography, and careful and considered use of color and images, and maybe in that case it would be time to break all the “rules” we’ve laid out here.

Familiarize yourself with the landscape, and create a plan to be unique, but true to your brand.



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## *A few more thoughts*

There is much to say about this topic, and much that has been written about it both online and in print, but here are just a few more parting thoughts to help you make the most effective print ads to get the best return on your print advertising investment.

**Create a campaign:** Develop a series of ads that relate to one another visually, and perhaps target individual niche markets with each ad, or otherwise tailor specific messages to each ad within a campaign.

**Experiment with calls to action:** Be sure to communicate with readers what you want them to do after they read your ad. If you're trying to generally establish a

brand, you can do away with the call to action, though in most cases, it's best at the very least to include some contact information, even if it's just a web address.

**Buy the right space:** Everyone would love to buy a full page ad, or even a full spread. Obviously that's not in everyone's budget, but an ad that's too small, or the wrong shape for your message, could be effectively throwing your money away. Be sure you're purchasing the right size and shape space for your ad.

**Show, don't tell:** It's a cliché, but a good one. Don't tell your customers why they should buy your product. Show them, either through clever narrative or the use of imagery, how your product will benefit them.

**Above all else, trust your designer:** Whether you have a dedicated agency, or are relying on the in-house services of the paper, you're most likely working with highly skilled professionals, many with decades of experience creating ads specifically for this medium. If you ask them to create something special, chances are you'll get a great result.

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