

The Seven Deadly Advertising Mistakes And How to Fix Them

Correct These Mistakes and Watch Your Results Soar

By Phil Bernstein

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What Customers Say About Phil Bernstein

"For the past six years, Phil Bernstein has consistently come up with fresh angles and designed strong, attention-getting campaigns for my dealerships. His commercials are creative, well-written, and action-oriented. And most important, they sell cars."

Joe Khorasani, President
Premier Auto Group
Portland, OR

"Professional landscapers depend on Shindaiwa outdoor power equipment to hold up for years under heavy use. I asked Phil Bernstein to help raise awareness within the burgeoning "prosumer" market -- consumers who will spend the money on professional-quality equipment.

Problem was, many prosumers didn't recognize the Shindaiwa name. Phil developed an extremely memorable radio campaign called "170 Engineers". The commercial was originally intended just for the Portland market, but we liked it so much that we licensed it for nationwide and international use. If you need help figuring out the best way to tell your story, Phil Bernstein is your guy."

Mike Nichols
VP, Business Development
Shindaiwa, Inc., Tualatin, OR

"VanderVeer Center specializes on non-surgical anti-aging medicine such as Botox, lipodissolve, Restylane and laser hair removal. It's a very competitive business, and I'm always looking for ways to attract new clients. I can depend on Phil Bernstein to provide strong marketing advice and creative ideas. From powerful advertising copy to promotions that bring in qualified leads, Phil knows how to help me tell a story that generates results."

Dr. Elizabeth VanderVeer
Owner and Medical Director
VanderVeer Center, Portland, OR

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The Problem

“I know half my advertising dollars are wasted. I just don’t know which half.” – John Wanamaker, 1886

Every day, thousands of local businesses like yours advertise in an effort to generate new customers. They buy print ads in the newspaper. They run commercials on radio or TV. They rent a mailing list and send direct mail pieces to thousands of homes.

Every month, businesses like yours spend millions of dollars on these efforts. And many are wasting their money. You may be one of them.

What You’ll Get From This Paper

The only reason to buy advertising is to tell your story, find more customers, and make more sales. And yet, an alarmingly high percentage of marketing fails to accomplish this.

There are seven common mistakes that companies make when they advertise. If you’re making any of them – and many businesses make more than one – the odds of success plummet, and your marketing dollars are wasted.

On the following pages, I’ll list all seven mistakes. Some of them may surprise you – many of them are so common that you probably assumed that they were good ideas. So I’ll explain in detail why they’re mistakes. Then I’ll tell you how to correct them.

Correct these mistakes, and your advertising could become 30 to 60 percent more effective – in many cases, without spending any more money!

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Why Should You Listen to Me?

I'm Phil Bernstein, and for the past thirteen years I've helped local businesses tell their stories, find more customers, and make more sales. I didn't major in advertising – in fact, I never took a marketing course in college.

Instead, I've spent thousands of dollars of my own money, and tens of thousands of hours, studying the work of the smartest and most successful copywriters, marketing gurus, and salespeople. Claude Hopkins, Dan O'Day, John Carlton, Perry Marshall, Dan Kennedy, Jim Doyle... I've bought their books, listened to their CD's, and attended their seminars.

And for the past thirteen years, I've put their theories and methods to work on behalf of hundreds of local businesses. From car dealers and real estate agents to window retailers to a school for troubled adolescents, I've designed campaigns to bring them new customers.

Has every campaign been a huge success? No. Some had just okay results, and a few were outright bombs.

But I discovered that the bombs had elements in common, and so did the home runs. And that it was possible to take a floundering campaign and make it successful by fixing some very simple and common mistakes.

That's what this report is all about. So let's get started.

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Deadly Advertising Mistake #1: Too Much Information

Try this experiment: get a partner and five tennis balls. Stand about seven or eight feet apart, and have your partner toss you one ball, underhand. Did you catch it? Chances are you did.

Now have your partner hurl the remaining four balls at you all at once. How many did you catch this time? Unless you're a brilliant athlete, you probably missed them all.

The first ball represents an ad focused on one single theme. A simple idea, stated clearly and powerfully, is easy for your target customer to catch and retain. The other four balls, heading your way at a high rate of speed, represent the temptation to say too many things in one commercial.

One of my colleagues recently showed me a radio script she was working on at the request of a lawn equipment dealer. The store owner wanted her to tell listeners to check out two different lawn mower models, attend a barbecue the store was holding that weekend, call a phone number, and visit a web site. Five separate ideas, all in thirty seconds!

It's physically possible to cram all of that into the script. But will their target customers remember all that? Will they remember anything? For most people, all those ideas are just so many tennis balls bouncing out of their grasp.

A much more effective approach would have been to decide on one thing they want the listener to do, and then hammer that point home. If the goal is to get people to visit the dealership during the weekend event, use the time to tell them why they'll benefit from visiting, and tell them how to get there. The web site belongs in the ad only if it's an easy way to get directions on barbecue day.

It's tempting to try to tell your target about everything you've got. But your customers are busy and distracted – they don't have the time

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or the attention span to sift through a lot of data and pull out the one thing that matters to them. If you make them work too hard to figure out what you want them to do, they'll just tune you out.

Deadly Advertising Mistake #2: No Call To Action

“Begin with the end in mind.” – Steven Covey

When a business owner contacts me to talk about a marketing project, I show up with a list of questions we need to answer before we start work on the sales message. The questions vary depending on the type of business, but one of them gets asked every single time:

When your customers hear your message, what do you want them to do?

In many cases, the person I'm talking to has been advertising for years and suspects he's been wasting his money. And yet, he's never really thought about it before, and so his sales message has always ended without a real call to action.

Your customers are too busy to figure out what you want them to do, so you have to tell them! Don't make them guess.

So I'll ask you now: When your customers hear your message, what do you want them to do?

- Visit your store? Tell them! “Visit our showroom at the corner of 12th and Main today!”**
- Call for an appointment? Tell them! “Call 503-323-6553 today for a no-obligation consultation.”**
- Log onto your web site? Tell them! “Log onto Phil Bernstein Online Dot Com and download your free report.”**

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- Call their congressman or senator? Tell them! “Call Gordon Smith today at 503.326.3386 and tell him to vote no!”

Give them one thing to do, and tell them how to do it. Don't make them guess.

Deadly Advertising Mistake #3 – Flunking the “So What” Test

Have you ever sat across from a salesperson who couldn't stop talking about himself and his products? The kind who subjected you to charts, graphs, spec sheets... but never got around to showing you how all that stuff was going to help you?

As each PowerPoint slide went by, you couldn't help thinking, “So what? What's in it for me?”

A good sales call focuses on the customer, not the seller. And your commercial, at its most basic level, acts as a sales call for your company. So why do local businesses pay good money to tell potential customers things like:

*“We're the oldest dealer in the Pacific Northwest, since 1961!” **

“We've won more President's Awards for customer satisfaction than any other store on the West Coast!”

“When you buy from us, you're always part of our family!”

So what??????

Your customers don't care about you. They care about themselves – their problems, their needs. The only reason they'll do business with you is if it somehow helps them. So when you advertise, don't talk about you – talk about how doing business with you will help them.

You've been around a long time. That's great – So what? How does this help your customer?

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You've won a bunch of President's Awards. Congratulations – So what? What's in it for your customer?

You're family owned and operated. I commend you – but the aisles are packed at Home Depot and Wal-Mart. What can you do for me that the big national guys can't?

Make sure that when you toss out a fact, you include a benefit to go with it.

Will your products perform better than the ones I can buy down the street? Will you special-order something important that I can't get at the big box stores? Will doing business with you save me time, money, or effort?

Make sure I know that. I'm your customer. I don't care about you. I care about me.

The next time you work on an ad, take a look at every claim you make. Put yourself in your customer's shoes, and make sure your ad passes the "So What?" test.

Deadly Advertising Mistake #4 – Moving Your Advertising Around

When you design a marketing campaign, it's natural to want to make sure you're targeting "the right people" with your message – the people who are most likely to do business with you.

Media people have access to a variety of research tools to make some educated decisions about the kind of people who are listening to, reading, watching, or logging onto our media. And our customers spend a lot of time, effort and money trying to pick the vehicle that reaches **The Right People.**

If you promise not to tell, I'll pass along a dirty little secret of this business:

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Nobody can reach all The Right People. The Right People are listening to my radio stations... and my competitors' stations. They watch TV (a whole bunch of channels, too). Some of them get their information from the newspaper, and some from the internet.

Further complicating the picture is the fact that very few people make decisions by themselves. People talk to each other and influence each other's choices. The end user may or may not be the person who decides what to buy.

Examples?

- In large companies, office equipment may be used primarily by administrative personnel. But the sales order might be issued by someone in the purchasing department. And orders over a certain size may need the blessing of the controller or even the CEO. All of those people may even seek advice from colleagues at other companies.**
- Here's how the Phi Beta Kappa college honor society solicits members, according to the Wall Street Journal: *"You get a letter during junior or senior year, with congratulations and a request to pay an initiation fee (generally \$50 to \$90). If you don't respond, some chapters send a follow-up letter to your parents."***

Who makes the decision to enroll in Phi Beta Kappa – the student or the parents? And when you're marketing office equipment, who are The Right People?

The odds are pretty good that whatever media choice you make, you'll reach a significant number of The Right People, and you'll miss some others. Many marketers deal with this by moving their advertising around to try to reach everyone. They run small, weak schedules on a bunch of TV stations. Or they do a little radio, a little TV, and a little newspaper.

There are two problems with this approach:

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- 1. Most people who hear or see your message don't need you today. It may be weeks, months, or years before they're actively in the market for your product or service. If you stop talking to them before they're ready to buy, they won't remember you when the time comes.**
- 2. People are exposed to so much advertising every day, they filter most of it out. You are just one of thousands of voices competing for their attention; you have to talk to them repeatedly before they even notice you.**

Every time you stop talking to one group of people and start talking to someone else, the process of gaining attention, interest, desire and action starts over – before you've made a sale.

You'll make more money by convincing ten percent of your market a hundred percent of the way than by convincing a hundred percent of your market ten percent of the way. Accept the fact that you just can't afford to talk to everybody effectively. Pick something that's within the realm of common sense, buy a strong schedule, and stay there.

Make sure that the people you do reach hear your message often – the more often you talk to your prospects, the better the chance they'll give you a call when they have a need.

Deadly Advertising Mistake #5 – Lack of Discipline

“People don't change when you tell them they should, but when they tell themselves they must.”

--Thomas Friedman

“If you get any calls off the ad during the first month, it's an accident.”

--Sean Shannon

I bought some tires not long ago. My decision-making process had three steps:

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- 1. I decided I needed new tires.**
- 2. I went to the “card file” (my mind), and pulled out the first tire company that came to mind – Les Schwab.**
- 3. I went to Les Schwab and bought some tires.**

It sounds simple and quick, right? Here’s the catch:

It took me six weeks to progress from Step 2 to Step 3. I decided to buy some tires in early September, but I didn’t get around to buying them until late October. Long after Les Schwab had convinced me to shop with them, I still hadn’t done anything about it!

Which is why Les Schwab doesn’t try an advertising schedule for a couple of weeks to “see if it works”. If they had, they would have decided it hadn’t worked on me. And they would have been wrong.

Before a customer does business with you, the customer must

- 1. Decide he or she needs the type of product or service you’re selling.**
- 2. Decide to buy it from you, and**
- 3. Get around to buying it.**

They’re going to take those steps based on their schedule, not yours. Sometimes, there’s some built-in deadline to the process – a hot concert ticket goes on sale; the car stops running and needs to be fixed right away; an upcoming law change eliminates a tax deduction.

More often, the purchase is important – buying a new couch, laser hair removal, replacing the windows -- but not that urgent. Consumers will go to the store or make the phone call when they get around to it.

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It's an easy trap to fall into. You start an advertising campaign. Intellectually, you've agreed that you won't expect instant results.

How about emotionally? Not so easy, is it?

We decide to lose weight, and go to the gym. Step on the scale, go work out, and then get on the scale again to find out how much weight we lost. On the first day!

It's human nature. The discipline to stick to a plan in the absence of instant results is tough to come by.

Even though we know – we know! – that a good campaign could take three months to generate measurable results, we can't help checking the numbers every day. We ask the receptionist, "Any calls today? Did anyone mention the ad?"

- **Fred Meyer doesn't try something for a couple of weeks to "see how it goes".**
- **The Shane Company doesn't cancel its advertising because they had a bad weekend.**
- **Les Schwab books its advertising a year at a time.**

The most successful companies have the discipline to put a long-term plan into effect and then stick to the plan. You need to do the same.

Deadly Advertising Mistake #6 – No Short-Term Follow-Up

I once worked with an auto dealer on a program targeting the bad-credit buyer. We ran radio commercials directing buyers to call an 800-number and give their contact information to a call-center operator.

The call center then emailed the information to the dealership so that a salesperson could follow up with the customer.

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The call center copied me on each email; after ten days I had 54 names, address and phone numbers in my briefcase when I walked in to the store owner's office for a meeting.

I was stunned when the dealer told me he hadn't made any sales from the program. And he was stunned when I handed him the list of 54 names, addresses and phone numbers. How, I asked, could he have received fifty-four leads and sold zero cars?

It turned out that when we set up the program, the call center emailed the leads to one of his sales managers. And that manager wasn't particularly diligent about checking his email. The leads would sit in his inbox until he got around to printing them off, which sometimes took a day or two.

By the time the salespeople made contact with the customers, it was too late. The prospects had bought cars somewhere else.

This is a distressingly common phenomenon. Smart businesspeople spend good money on advertising designed to bring in customers, without setting up systems to capture and convert the leads.

As you get ready to launch a campaign, you need to take some time and check your sales funnel.

- Is the phone number correct in your ad? Pick up the phone and dial it.**
- Do you have people in place to answer the phone or check the web inquiries? Have your ad rep make an inquiry and see how quickly someone responds.**
- Is someone responsible for following up each lead in a timely fashion? Make sure that person is held accountable.**
- Do the links work on your web site? Click on them!**

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- **Do your people know what's in the commercial? Are you sure? Gather the staff together and play the ad for them before it hits the air.**
- **Is the advertised product in stock, on display, and marked at the correct price? Go through the store and check.**

A good ad campaign with poor follow-up is money wasted.

Deadly Advertising Mistake #7 – No Long -Term Follow-Up

It takes six times as much time, money and effort to create a new customer as it does to sell to an existing customer. Once your advertising has caused a prospect to call your business or walk into your store, that prospect becomes much more valuable than a stranger on the street.

Yet many businesses forget those customers as soon as they hang up the phone or walk out the door. Which means they're throwing away money.

A customer who just bought from you could easily be persuaded to buy again. And some very good prospects just aren't ready to buy right now – but they'll buy from *somebody* down the road.

The *lifetime value* of a customer is the money that customer will spend over the long haul if you continue to do business. The lead your advertising has created could be worth thousands of additional dollars... if you make the effort to stay in touch.

Whether or not that lead turns into a sale, you need to

- 1. Capture the prospect's contact information and put it into your data base.**
- 2. Communicate with the prospect on a regular basis.**

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You can stay in regular touch by sending offers through the mail, sending them (with permission) an email newsletter, or just calling every few months.

Implement a long-term follow-up program, and the lifetime value will go to you. Or skip this important step, and let all the money go to go to your competitors.

The choice is yours.

The Phil Bernstein Advertising Audit – A Possible Next Step

This report gives you some tools you can use to take a good, hard look at your advertising. You need to determine whether you are making any of these mistakes, and if you are, how to fix them.

I'm available to take a good, hard look with you, with a one-hour Advertising Audit. If you qualify, I'll evaluate every aspect of your advertising program – media placement, reach, frequency, and – most important – the quality of your sales message.

Once we've completed the Audit – there's no charge for the initial hour (a \$150 value) – I'll put together some recommendations to help you more effectively tell your story, find more customers and make more sales.

To schedule an Advertising Audit, give me a call at 503-323-6553.

Thanks for reading this report. If you have any comments, I'd love to hear 'em. Give me a call or email me at philbernstein@clearchannel.com.