

# CLASSIFIED ADS WORK HARD, COST LITTLE

by Trey Ryder

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If you want to put your marketing message in many places, rather than investing all your advertising dollars in one or two publications, I urge you to consider classified ads. While long-copy ads can be very effective, don't underestimate the power of small ads. Two speeches were given at Gettysburg. We remember the short one.

## ADVANTAGES

**POINT #1:** Classified ads help you target narrow or broad audiences through all types of publications, including industry and trade magazines, professional newsletters, small-town weeklies and daily newspapers.

**POINT #2:** Classified ads can attract a highly qualified audience, depending on the nature of the publication. Readers who are looking for something in particular are drawn to specific named sections. In most cases, if readers were not interested in the subject, they would not read ads in that section.

**POINT #3:** Classified ads are quite affordable because the advertising rate is usually based on the publication's circulation. For example, you might effectively reach your target audience in a professional newsletter or small-town newspaper with an ad costing as little as \$25 or \$50. And while you might not get a large response, dollar for dollar, classified ads often pull a better response than other types of advertising.

**POINT #4:** Classified ads may have a pre-emptive effect on yellow page advertising, because if prospects find you in a classified ad -- and if you establish a trusting relationship -- those prospects may have no reason to open the phone directory.

## EFFECTIVENESS

Lawyers often conclude classified ads are for attorneys who don't have big advertising budgets. But running classified ads doesn't necessarily brand you as a small-time lawyer. Troy-Bilt, one of the most successful companies in the garden equipment industry, carries out intense advertising programs through classified ads because they've learned classified's are a highly effective way to reach their target buyers.

## MANY PURPOSES

You can write classified ads so they (1) offer free educational materials, (2) direct prospects to your web site, (3) offer a free consultation, (4) offer your newsletter, and so on. (See examples below.)

## TWO TYPES OF CLASSIFIEDS

Classified ads usually break down into two categories, regular classifieds and display classifieds. The regular classified is the smaller ad in block form that we see most often. The display classified is a small display ad (with headline, copy and contact information) that is placed into a column of regular classified ads, similar to an in-column ad in the yellow pages. Today I'll discuss how to write a regular classified ad.

## HOW TO WRITE AND PLACE CLASSIFIED ADS

**TIP #1: Look at classified ads in the publication you're considering.** See which ones grab your attention. Notice how those attention-grabbing ads use black headlines, reversed-out headlines, black borders, white space, words on different lines, and so forth. Decide how you'd like your ad to look. Most classified ad reps are there to accept your advertising order, so it's not fair to expect their help with content or graphics. They expect you to have your ad prepared when you call.

**TIP #2: Write down each point you want to make.** Then pare down your copy by omitting all unnecessary words. When you cut a long-copy ad down to a small ad, you're left with only the meat. You may find that the shorter ad is more efficient than the longer version.

**TIP #3: Write a short headline so the words can be set in big, bold type to attract attention.** You might use a two- or three-word headline that identifies the prospects you want to reach. Perhaps: Business Owners, Senior Citizens, Accident Victims. Or, choose words that describe how your prospect will benefit: Protect Your Family, Avoid Business Lawsuits, Reduce Taxes.

**TIP #4: Use telegraphic language.** Find a way to turn sentences into short two- or three-word bursts, the way you'd write a telegram. For example, instead of saying, "We'll be glad to mail our free booklet to you," just say "free booklet". Instead of saying, "You can call 24 hours a day," just say "24 hours."

**TIP #5: Code your ads so you can tell which ads draw the highest response.** You might do this by putting a different phone number or e-mail address in each ad. In this way, you know which ads, which publications and which months bring you the highest return.

**TIP #6: If the ad will reach a broad geographical area, make sure you offer a toll-free number.** Often, prospects won't hesitate to write a check for your retainer, but they may refuse to pay for a long-distance call to your office.

**TIP #7: If you think some prospects might hesitate to call because they don't want to talk to a live person, then tell them when the phone number in your ad goes to voice mail.**

**TIP #8: Ask for a new ad category all your own.** Don't limit yourself to the categories you see in the publication. Often, newspapers and magazines will create a new category if your subject doesn't fall under an existing heading. The new category banner really helps attract attention to your ad.

**TIP #9: Test your ad in different classified categories.** Don't think that you must be in the category that reflects what you offer. Some newspapers let you put your ad in any category you wish. Categories called "Miscellaneous" and "Personal" often get very high readership because readers never know what they'll find.

**TIP #10: Check your ethics rules.** Some bar associations require your firm name and address to appear in your ad. Others require additional notices.

**TIP #11: Ask to see a proof of your ad before publication.** The person who enters your ad into the computer has already typed in 100 other ads the same day. All the time and effort you put into design and wording can be swept away with a few careless keystrokes. Also, classified employees often abbreviate words, assuming every advertiser wants the cheapest ad. When possible, make sure you see the final proof.

Also, if you're looking for a statewide market, consider running your classified ad in an advertising network. For example, in Arizona, we have the Arizona Classified Advertising Network (AzCan). You can place a 25-word ad in 93 Arizona newspapers for \$330. The circulation (actual copies printed and delivered) is 1,130,462.

You simply place one ad with the network and they distribute it to their member papers. If you're interested, check with your state newspaper association, which usually represents these networks.

## **SAMPLE ADS**

I've included the address in these sample ads assuming your bar association requires it. If not, you can shorten the ad considerably. Also, many newspapers capitalize the first two or three words and put them in bold. And last, many newspapers put ads in alphabetical order based on the first word in the ad. You can often get your ad first in the category based simply on the words you select.

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