

How To Write 'Awesome' Ads

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How To Use This Guide

I strongly suggest that you read this document from start to finish, before revising, or creating your ad. The reason for this, is because the components of your ad that are covered in this document are not exclusive. That means that even though ‘Creating Your Headline’ is covered early in chapter 3.1, you still need to be mindful of the rules for ‘Typeface’ that’s not covered until later, in 3.2 for example.

Once you’re familiar with the whole document you can get started on your ad, while using the document as a reference. You’ll also find some examples of ads in the directory, where you found this document, to give you some inspiration.

Now, it’s time to get started – there’s clients out there, just waiting to come and deal with you. You just need the right ad ...

1. What defines a successful advertisement?

Basically any advertisement that pays for itself can be considered successful. That’s not to say our objective is to spend \$100 and get \$100 worth of sales as a result of it. What you need to understand is your ‘acquisition cost’ and the ‘lifetime value’ of each customer.

1.1 Acquisition cost

Your acquisition cost is determined by how much your advertisement cost, divided by how many customers, or leads, it generates for your business. Once you’ve calculated this figure you can then work out, how many times each customer needs to purchase from you, before they become profitable. In the average business this will mean selling to them, 2.5 times, before you begin to make a profit. It’s important to be ‘mindful’ of your acquisition cost, as it will help you evaluate the likely chance of success, given the variables (like the ‘publication’, or ‘season’ for example). Knowing the acquisition cost is important when working out your ‘offer’ and you’ll see how this works in chapter 3.3 Offers.

Here’s an example of working out ‘acquisition cost’...

Realistically you should take into consideration, both ‘hard cost’ (actual dollars spent); and ‘soft cost’ (the value of your time etc.). For Example, let’s say you run an advertisement in the newspaper...

Costs:	Your time creating the ad draft... 2 hours (at \$50 per hour)	=	\$100
	Graphic artist to ‘pretty-up’ your ad		\$100
	Advertising Cost		\$300
	Total Cost		\$500
	<hr/>		
	Calls/Visits generated from Ad	=	10
	Conversion Rate from Prospect to Customer	=	20%

That means, your acquisition cost is: \$50 per lead = \$100 per customer.

2. The Keys To Print Advertising Success...

2.1 Who (Are Your Target Market)?

If you don't know who your target market is, it's almost impossible to attract them. Imagine going fishing without knowing specifically what you wanted to catch. You'd have to take a 'let's see' approach.

Unfortunately, the 'let's see' method of advertising, tends to fail a lot and waste a significant amount of money!

Your efforts will be far better rewarded if you know the characteristics of your ideal client; what they're interested in; and what's going to make them buy your product.

So let's get specific – who are the people most likely to be interested in your product or service. Here are some characteristics to consider ...

- **Age:** How old are they? Don't just say 'all ages' or 'a variety'. We want to create a picture in mind of your average customer. Think of an age that symbolises most of your customers.
- **Gender:** Are they male or female? 'Half and half' is too broad. Practically every business is split one way or the other. Give it some real thought – which gender spends more with you and visits more often.
- **Income:** How much do they make? Do they earn a great living, meaning that quality is the big issue, or are they scraping for every dollar, always looking for deal. It's essential that you find this out.
- **Where do they live:** Are they local, or do they come from miles around to deal with you? This will dictate how you communicate with them.
- **Interests:** Do they belong to local sporting clubs? Own pets? Belong to Associations or Institutes?

Of course a brilliant way to find this information out, is to survey your existing 'A Grade' clients to try and find a correlation between them, or characteristics that they share.

2.1.1 Suspect vs Prospect

Another important point to consider, is whether you are targeting '*suspects*', or '*prospects*'.

A **suspect** is somebody who isn't yet interested in purchasing your product or service. An ad targeting suspects, needs to say what you do in the headline and sell the benefit of your product or service AND why they should pick you. You put ads for 'suspects' into the 'general' section of the publication. For example a 'suspect' never 'browses the yellow pages', that's for Prospects!

A **prospect** is already interested in your product or service and is primarily deciding *who* to choose. Ads targeting prospects are most often found in the 'classified' section of publications. They don't need to promote what you sell; they need to define how you're different from your competitors (who's ads are normally surrounding yours).

2.2 Where (To run your advertisement)?

Now you've identified the 'who', you need to find a publication that reaches them. There may be a number of seemingly suitable publications around. Be very mindful to match your 'delivery capability with the 'publication's 'coverage'. It would be pointless and wasteful for a 'single hairdresser' to advertise in a national magazine for example.

To find out which of them works best for you, try them all and test and measure the results.

2.2.1 Daily Newspapers ...

The first of these are Daily newspapers. These papers are printed 6 or 7 days a week. Circulation can vary greatly from day to day. For example a papers circulation (number of papers sold each day), may be 45,000 on a Saturday and only 23,500 on a Monday. Though 'daily' papers are more widely read, their 'decay rate' is high, with most ending up in the trash, within a day or two.

2.2.2 Weekly Newspapers ...

These are only printed once a week and are quite often delivered free of charge, to the home. Because Weekly newspapers are delivered to specific areas and because it is a week, before the next one arrives, they have a longer 'decay rate' than 'daily' papers, as they are 'hanging around' the home for several days.

2.2.3 Magazines ...

Because most magazines are national publications, they can be quite expensive. The major benefit of advertising in magazines, is that they target people with specific interests. Magazine advertising can also be very effective for companies who sell by mail order.

2.2.4 Trade Journals ...

Trade journals are one of the least expensive forms of print advertising. Companies advertising in these publications, have the advantage of being able to reach a very specific market. Whilst this is a benefit, it can also be a limitation, as they generally won't have a very high readership. To use trade journals effectively, you need to have a great offer.

2.2.5 Newsletters ...

Schools, sporting groups and other businesses and organizations, may have newsletters you can advertise in. An offer that includes 'fund-raising' for the school or organization can work extremely well and provides incentive.

2.3 What (Do You Want To Say)?

There's no such thing as 'image advertising'. This is the term newspapers and marketing people give to advertising that normally doesn't contribute sales and is often justified with the excuse of 'its building your *brand*'.

Your ad must have get a reader's attention, be compelling reading and have an offer that inspires the reader to take some action!

It's essential that WHAT you say is appealing to WHO you are trying to say it too. For example, throwing in a bungee jump with enrolment at a retirement village probably won't work. A free celebration dinner with the elderly person's children and grandchildren might.

Let's deal with each type of message, one by one ...

- **Strong Offer:** This is the most commonly used, and the one that tends to work the best. Remember that people are totally uninterested in reading the ads – they've usually picked up the publication to keep informed and be entertained. An ad with an offer that stops them in their tracks can really work. See section 4 for more detail.
- **Point Of Difference:** Can work well when there is a large market for your product, and many competitors. For example, if you are advertising a 'steak and seafood' restaurant, you'd be hard pressed to stand out. But what if your steakhouse had live entertainment, free drinks from 7pm and the best view in town? That would be worth promoting.
- **Listing The Benefits:** If you don't have a strong offer or point of difference, listing the benefits of dealing with you may do the trick. For example, a hairdresser could list the 4 reasons they give the best haircuts in town, or a beauty salon could emphasise the 6 ways a prospect's skin will improve after one visit. Most importantly, you must relate the benefits to the customer – remember, always write your ad about their favourite subject – THEM.
- **Something Newsworthy:** Perhaps you've just opened a new room in your restaurant, or you have a famous author coming in for book-signings. Maybe you've just been given an award, or one of your staff has done something amazing for a customer. If something has happened that has genuine interest value, tell your readers about it. But remember, it must encourage them to come in and buy (note: your secretary's third engagement is not worthwhile news).

3. The Components Of Your Ad

Now that we've covered the basics, it's time to get into the nuts and bolts of how to write your print advertisement.

3.1 Writing 'Killer' Headlines

The most important part of your advertisement is the headline. David Ogilvy, one of the all time great direct response copywriters, once said that 10 times as many people will read the headline as will read the rest of the ad. So if you get the headline wrong you can kiss 90% of your advertising dollars goodbye.

One of the things you need to keep in mind, is that the headline needs to take up at least 25% of your advertisement. Before you place your advertisement, find out which type face the paper uses on it's editorial headlines, and then request that yours be set in that same type face.

The best headlines do 3 things – identify the right target market, provide benefits and generate enough interest to get them to start reading.

Let's look at each one in more depth ...

3.1.1 Call Your Target Market

You need to make sure that your target market see and read your ad. Your headline needs to immediately call to them. There's nothing wrong with starting your headline with **'MOTHERS'**, or even **'ATTENTION Ladies 37-40 With No Children'**. Of course, there are other more subtle ways, such as **'Here's How To Make Your Ford Go Faster'**, or **'How To Help Your Kids Succeed At School This Year'**.

3.1.2 Provide Benefits

You need to give your readers reasons to investigate further. Think about it – what is really going to make them want to read. What can you say about your product or service – what is the main benefit? Once you've thought of that, try coming up with some more specific and interesting ways of phrasing it. For example **'How You Can Make An Extra \$4500 This Year And Pay Off Those Credit Card Debts'** is more interesting than **'How You Can Make More Money'**.

3.1.3 Generate Interest

There's nothing more powerful than curiosity. Compare these two headlines –

'AMWAY: a new future for you'

vs.

'How you make \$1100 extra per week, by meeting 3 new people a month'.

Both are for the same company, but one holds more interest value and is more likely to get you reading. Try getting the main benefit across without telling the whole story, and getting a bit of mystery in there. Of course, too much mystery can kill your whole ad. Who'd read an ad with a headline such as 'Pure grunt', 'Big cheese' or 'Stilted'?

3.1.4 Headline Starters

This is where you get to write potential headlines for your ad. You'll get a sharper focus of what you want to really say to potential customers, as well as learning what makes a headline work. Adding what's called a 'LOOP' to your headline, will compel you readers to read the copy, as it will deliver the answers to the promise of the headline.

Here are some 'loops' to get you started...

X Reasons ...

7 Reasons To Choose ACE Accounting ...

5 Reasons To Visit A Happy Family Entertainment Centre Today...

Here's why ...

Here's Why Bill's Restaurant Will Satisfy You Like No Other...

Here's Why No Leaks Plumbing Is Your Best Choice When You Need Fast Plumbing...

Here's how ...

Here's How You Can Play The Best Golf Of Your Life...
Here's How To Get Your Savings Working For You...

Announcing ...

Although not a specific 'loop', Announcing certainly creates 'curiosity'...
Announcing ... Top Salon Opens In Town.
Announcing... Amazing Savings For Locals...

You'll also notice the use of '...' after the headlines above. This encourages the reader to 'read-on' to the copy, where as exclamation Marks tend to 'stop' a reader.

Headlines that are questions, should also be avoided as a norm. Readers tend to answer the question in their heads, then move on, rather than engaging in the copy of your ad.

Finally, applying the ad to the reader by using 'You', or 'Your', is also very powerful.

3.2 Body Copy

You only get one chance with a prospect who's been attracted by your headline, so your first 50 words are crucial. You must arouse your readers curiosity immediately, with the very first paragraph. If they're not excited after the first 50 words they won't read the rest of your ad.

Use the bare minimum of copy, to get your message across. Don't waffle on. However, do make sure you include enough information, to get your reader interested enough to take action. You should never tell the whole story in your ad. By holding back some information, you make it necessary for them to call you, to find out more.

You can also try to make your advertisement look like an editorial. After all, this is why people read publications in the first place. You may be required by the publication, to put the word 'ADVERTISEMENT' across the top of your ad, but this shouldn't have much of an impact on your results.

3.2.1 Typeface

The typeface or font that you use in your advertisement, can make a big difference to the results you achieve. The 2 basic types are Sans Serif and Serif fonts.

Sans Serif fonts don't have the little "feet" at the bottom of each letter. Studies have shown that people find these fonts far more difficult to read than serif fonts. Serif type has the little "feet" or "hooks" at the bottom of each letter. These "feet" appear to form a line under the words that your eye can follow. If you want people to read your advertisement, use a serif typeface.

The most common type of serif font is Times New Roman. Find out the font used by the publication your ads running in and then have your ad set in that font.

Avoid too many colours or different font types. It just reduces the comprehension of the reader by interrupting the flow.

3.2.2 Point Size ...

The size of the font you use is referred to as point size. Studies have shown that readership does not drop of between 14 to 7 ½ point size. As a general rule, 10 – 9 points are ideal.

3.2.3 Highlighting text ...

Use **bold** type to highlight key points in your body copy, headlines and sub-headlines, but be careful not to bold the wrong words. The word in Bold, has to accentuate the words that will attract your target market.

Here's some examples...

Wrong: **Free** Sample Cream With Every Beauty Treatment.

Right: Free Sample Cream With Every **Beauty Treatment**.

Wrong: 3 Reasons To Sack Your Mechanic and **Change To Bob's** Servicing!

Right: 3 Reasons To **Sack Your Mechanic** and Change To Bobs!

Italics can also be used to highlight key areas of text, although it can be hard to read and should only be used sparingly. Never use ALL CAPITALS as they are harder to read than normal type. The only time you should really use all capitals, is in a short headline, or for extra emphasis.

3.2.4 Sub-headlines ...

Sub-headlines have 3 major benefits ...

- They break up large blocks of text making them easier to read. If your advertisement looks like one big 'chuck' of text it can put people of reading it. By using sub-headlines you can break your copy up and give it some 'space'.
- They allow someone skimming over your ad to only read the points that interest them.
- They spark the readers interest. If your headline doesn't get them in completely you can get a second chance with your sub-headlines.

It is important that your sub-headlines tell a story. Your sub-headlines need to be able to convey your message to those people who are just browsing over your ad.

3.2.5 Pictures ...

Studies have shown that ads containing a picture that takes up between 25 – 75% of the total advertisement have greater readership, than those without one. You'll probably need to put a fair amount of text in your ad, so 25% is probably the ideal size. Avoid line drawings or clipart if you can. Photographs get a much higher response than illustrations.

You should also consider putting a photo of yourself in the ad. People buy from people, not companies, so let them see the person behind the company name. Place your photo so it looks straight out from the page, or towards your body copy. If your picture is looking towards your copy, prospects will also be drawn to it.

It's advisable to put a caption under your photo too. Everybody reads the caption, so make sure you take advantage of this opportunity to get a key point across.

3.3 Your Offer

So you've written a great headline, an exciting first paragraph and sub-headlines that tell a story. But what are you going to do, to get your target market to respond? Great copy alone won't work, you need to have a strong offer, an offer that *you'd* respond to. So what's a great offer?...

When thinking of what to offer your customers, ask yourself – “If I read this ad, would the offer be good enough to make me respond?” If the answer is NO, then go back to the drawing board. Without a great offer, you cannot achieve great results. Another great test is to ask some of your friends and family if your offer would compel them to pick up the phone, or visit your business.

Your knowledge of your acquisition cost will help you work out what you can 'afford' to offer. Let's take the example of two ads for a 'Locksmith'...

Ad	Offer	Leads	Cost	Acquisition Cost
A	Great Service (\$0)	4	\$200 ad	\$50 each
B	2 Free Keys Cut (valued at \$10)	20	\$200 ad + (20 x \$2 actual cost of keys) = \$240	\$12 each

So, from the example you can see it was worth offering something that had 'true value'. Work out what you'd be prepared to pay for a brand new client and start there. Of course try and find an offer that has low 'hard' dollar value (what it actually costs), and high 'Soft' dollar value (the perceived value by the prospect).

3.3.1 Some Examples:

Powerful offers ...

- Free haircut – For a hairdressing saloon looking to increase its database.
- Free Wine or Beer When Dining – Restaurant recruiting members for its VIP Club.
- 1 New Release Video and a Large Pizza for \$5 – Video store promotion to recruit new members.

All of these offers are worthwhile and sure to get a great response. Weak offers will cause your ad to fail. Understand that your offer is the part of your ad that gets your customers to act now, and to buy from you rather than your opposition.

Weak Offers ...

- 10% Off – This is normally not a big enough discount to generate action.
- Call now for your free colour brochure – So what?
- Buy 9 and get the 10th for ½ price – No one would respond to this offer.

3.3.2 Leveraging Other Businesses

There's a great opportunity to approach other businesses in the area and ask what they'd be prepared to offer your prospects. The benefit is that the business that contributes the 'reward' gets to share the prospect.

Case Study

I once worked with a beauty salon and Day Spa. I noticed there was a Hair Salon across the road. So when we were trying to come up with a compelling offer for an ad, I thought to approach the Hair Salon. We asked what they could offer our clients as an incentive to try the hair salon, and the owner suggested they could give away a free 'semi-permanent colour', or a 'set of foils'!

So the ad for my Beauty Salon client, offered a Free Colour or Foils, with any beauty treatment and it didn't cost my client a cent!

3.3.3 The Added Value with Soft Dollar Cost ...

Soft Dollar Cost refers to products, services or added extras that you can combine with your standard product to make it more attractive and increase its perceived value, but don't add much if anything to your costs.

For this strategy to be effective the added extra must have a high perceived value, in other words your customers must see the added benefit as being great value.

3.3.4 The Package Offer ...

By packaging products and services together you create a more marketable combination. There is a higher perceived value when products or services are packaged, your customers will want to buy more, simply because of the extra products they get when buying a product they already want.

One of the best examples of a great package is computer equipment. Buy the hardware and receive the software for free. This style of offer is very attractive to potential customers.

3.3.5 Discounts vs. Bonus Offers ...

More often than not discounting will cost you profits. A far better way of clearing stock and generating extra trade is to have a 2 for the price of 1 sale. Or, try a buy one of these and get one of these FREE. The other way of putting this offer is every 10th purchase free, or when you spend \$100, we'll give you \$20 of your next purchase.

3.3.6 Valued at Offer ...

If you are including a free item in your ad, make sure you value them. For example – RING now for your FREE consultation, normally valued at \$75. This positions your time, product, or service much more than a simple free give-away that people won't value or appreciate.

3.3.7 Time Limited Offers ...

Place a time limit on your offer, it will dramatically increase the response rate because it gives people a reason to respond right now. Place urgency in your offer ... For a short time only ... Call before such and such ... Only while stocks last. These will all create a sense of urgency in your consumers mind.

3.3.8 Guarantee Offers ...

Using a guarantee offer is a great way to boost the response to your ad. People will be far more willing to part with their money if you take the risk out of the buying decision. The better the guarantee you make the higher your response will be.

3.3.9 FREE Offers ...

Giving away something absolutely free (no catches whatsoever) is often a brilliant way to build a loyal customer base. Offer a "bribe" to get them in the door initially, then great service and products to encourage them to come back. This type of offer can reduce your "cost per lead" dramatically.

4. Other Considerations

4.1 How Big (Should Your Ad Be)?

There's a lot more to working out a size than most people think. Usually, it's a case of 'How much can we afford?'

The question really should be 'How much do we want to make?'. If the ad is good enough, it should make you money – not drain your funds.

If you don't have an ad that you know works, you need to guess. You need to think about how many responses you need to 'break-even'. That means, how many sales do you need to pay back the advertising cost.

Here's how you work it out ...

1. First, you need to work out your average profit.
2. Next, choose a standard ad size. If it's a newspaper, find out the price on a 15x3 (15cm deep and 3 columns wide). If you're dealing with a magazine, get the price on a quarter page ad.
3. Now, divide the ad cost by your average profit. This will give you the number of sales you need to pay for the ad.

Here's an example ...

Let's say a hairdresser makes about \$15 profit from each haircut. They take out an ad that costs \$270. That means they need 18 new customers from the ad. Anything less and the ad is losing them money.

Of course, it's not a hard and fast rule, that you must break-even on every ad. In the case of the hairdresser, they'd probably be happy with 9 new loyal customers. After each customer has been in twice, they then become profitable.

To decide how big your ad should be, you have to guess how many replies you're likely to get. This can be tricky, especially if you haven't had a lot of experience with advertising. In fact, even if you've advertised many times, it can still be tricky.

You can only really rely on what you've done before, what your competitors seem to get and your instinct.

In the end, it comes down to probability. Let's say you sell pizzas with a profit margin of \$1.20. Taking out an ad that costs \$1,200 means you need 1,000 new customers to pay for it. You need to judge whether that's likely to happen. If you ran an ad last year and got 5 replies, it's looking pretty improbable!

In some cases, you may realise that breaking even is near impossible, in which case you have to think about lifetime value, or generate leads somewhere else.

The other thing to consider is this – papers and magazines with high rates, usually have high readership. It's not as if you're paying more for nothing. If you go with a cheaper paper, you're likely to get a lower response rate.

Once you've weighed all that up, then consider how much space you actually *need*. How much text is in your ad? How big are the other ads on the page? Will you be seen if you go small? Do your pictures need to be a certain size?

If you need more space than you can reasonably afford, you may need to look at a different approach - that is, another creative approach. Perhaps you could take the picture out and trim some of the text.

Lastly, it's important to start small and work your way up. Do your ad big enough, so it has a good chance of working, but not so big that you'll go bankrupt if it bombs. Take all that into account and decide upon a size from your first ad.

Remember your ad normally doesn't need to 'make the entire sale'. It just needs to get the prospect to pick up the phone!

Another great strategy to consider, is to have two smaller ads. Each one calling to a different target market. This can work better than having a single larger ad.

I remember, I had a florist client of mine, divide up a large ad into 4 smaller ones. Each had a different headline: Flowers for Funerals; Flowers for A New Mum; Flowers for Lovers; & Flowers For To Cheer Up Your Clients. This strategy worked vastly better than the previous single ad.

4.2 When (To Run Your Ad)

If your product is perennial (that is, not seasonal), you don't have to be too concerned about when you run your ad. It's more a question of which day, rather than which time of year.

You'll probably pay different rates for different days. You need to take into consideration the circulation of the different papers, and how many more readers you're getting for your money.

Also, major newspapers usually have different lift-out sections each day of the week. You may want to place your ad in one of these special sections. This can yield good results, although many of your competitors might be right next to you.

If your business is seasonal, you need to approach advertising differently. For example, a swimming pool builder would find it fruitless running a 'summer ad' in winter. The business owner would need to adapt the appeal to suit the time of year.

The other consideration is major events – for instance, advertising sports merchandise the week before the grand final, would work well.

4.3 Production

For example, you may need to take some new photos. Don't compromise here – people interpret a lot from photos, and a bad one can really put them off. If the publication wants finished artwork, you may need to send them a 'bromide' – a high quality print of the ad. Phone a printer and ask for some advice here. Also, make sure you check everything before it goes to print. Ask for a 'proof' (finished copy) from the publication and check it thoroughly – don't let anything go out with spelling mistakes or (and yes, it does happen), the wrong phone number.

4.4 Phone Scripts

There's hundreds of cases where an ad made the phone ring off the hook, but the business owner saw very few sales at the end of the day. It's all to do with 'conversion' – that is, how many enquiries you turn into sales. You need a script – a version of what you say to encourage people to buy. Just think about the best sales lines you've ever used, and compile them into one typed up script. Make sure you ask lots of 'open-ended questions' – that is, questions that start with who, what, where, why etc. Give a copy to every member of your team and make sure they USE it. And of course, make sure your team know that an advertisement has been placed and to EXPECT calls.

4.5 Check Stock and Staff Levels

It's unlikely your ad will bring in hundreds of people (very few actually do), but you need to be prepared for a sizable response. There would be nothing worse than running a successful ad then running out of stock, or being too busy to service these new enquiries. Plan for the ad – and make sure you can cater for any increased demand.

4.6 Testing and Measuring ...

You can often do testing of your ad 'components', before rolling out the full campaign.

4.6.1 Testing in 'classifieds'

You can test several headlines, in the classified section of a local paper for example. When prospects call, ask them which headline they were responding to. Once you establish the most popular, you can test your offers.

4.6.2 Testing with Survey

Surveying your clients or prospects can work well. You can have some fun with this if you have a retail store by printing each headline on a separate 'box' on the counter. Then ask each person to pick a box and count how many times each box is opened. A chocolate in each box is their reward!

Once you have combined the most popular of several headlines and offers, your chances of your ad working well are vastly improved.

4.6.3 Unique Keys

Whether testing your headline, offer, or your completed ad, you'll need a 'key' to help you identify which prospects were generated by which ad. Some ideas for 'keys' are...

- A phone number unique to that ad, for enquiries.
- Call 'Bill' for your special offer (you don't need to have a real 'Bill' by the way).
- A unique website for enquiries;
- Mention this ad for XXX (your offer);
- Bring in this ad for XXX (your offer); or
- Mention the secret codeword for your offer.

5. Conclusion

Knowing your 'numbers' will help you massively reduce the 'gamble' you'll take as you experiment with different approaches. However once you've established that your ad is profitable each time it runs, you can leave it to do its work. Always remember though, that you need to keep tracking its effectiveness, as eventually its responses will probably decline. Unfortunately, that period is impossible to forecast... That's completely up to the whims of your prospects.

Good luck!