

Blueprint for Yellow Pages success



By LARRY SMALL

Advertising is a tricky thing. What catches the eye and what pricks the ears is subjective at best. And, yet every day—in our living rooms watching television, in our cars listening to the radio, at work reading the newspaper, in a doctor's office where we pick up a magazine in the waiting room—we are bombarded with thousands of images, each one vying for our attention, and trying to convince us to spend our hard-earned dollars.



Small: Millions seek landscapers.

Some of these images work and some don't.

Understanding this tricky and subjective equation can seem daunting. But this understanding is essential for every member of the lawn maintenance industry, especially when each year, nearly 36 million references are made to the "Lawn Maintenance" heading in the Yellow Pages.

The "Landscape Contractors" heading is referred to 38.3 million times every year.

- According to a recent usage survey:
- 18 percent of American adults refer to the Yellow Pages every day;
- the average adult refers to the Yellow Pages an average of 1.8 times a week;
- there are 18.6 billion Yellow Pages references made every year.

In 52 percent of references, consumers

have no name, or two or more store or business names in mind, and report that what they see and read in a Yellow Pages ad will influence which business they choose.

Customers are using the Yellow Pages when they're in the need of landscaping or lawn maintenance. But what makes a perspective client chose one Yellow Pages ad over another? Here are some tips to creating a successful Yellow Pages ad:

Ad flow and design.

A successful ad design draws the reader's eye directly to the ad. Keep the reader's eye heading directly toward the business' phone number. Vary the size of the type to keep the reader's interest and don't use a type style that is too ornate or distracting. Highlight with reverse type, especially for the company name and phone number. Make sure your ad is clean, uncluttered and easy to read: make use of "white" (empty) space.

Headline and copy

A successful headline is catchy and draws readers to your ad. Make your headline funny or bold or in the form of a question. Make your headline act as a quick identification for customers referred to your business. Identify the single most important feature of your business that sets you apart from the competition and highlight it.

Because you are competing for the reader's attention as well as for space, keep your copy succinct and to the point. Emphasize the benefits of your product or service. Specify brand names and areas of specialization and emphasize information that sets you apart from the competition. Give special attention to your phone number.

Color & logo

When used, color can enhance your ad and creatively illustrate your product.

If you have a distinctive log, use it to gain attention for your ad. This also encourages people to associate your logo with your business.

Illustrations, borders

An illustration is one of the most effective ways to attract attention to your ad. Use large, graphically pleasing images. Use an illustration to break the border for added visual interest and appeal. Illustrations should always point to your ad, not your competitor's ad.

Borders can be very effective, especially if all of the other ads on the page use a bold or a hairline border and you choose the opposite.

Spot color, process color, white knockout

These pages capture attention regardless of ad placement on the page; the illustrations look more realistic. Ads that use these techniques make strong statements and stress unique selling points. These ads can also convey prestige.

With the average adult referring to the Yellow Pages about 1.8 times a week, and with almost 19 billion Yellow Pages references made every year, advertising in the Yellow Pages is clearly a must for any successful lawn or landscape business. □

—The author is vice president marketing services, Yellow Pages Publishers Association.