How to make killer performance ads (for editors and strategists) | Volume 1

First, the golden rules.

1. Our ads must target emotions.
2. There must be a promise.
3. There must be proof.
4. There must be zero confusion.
5. They must sell.
6. They must entertain.
7. They must be memorable.
8. Creativity wins.
9. Assumptions are the death of ads.
10. The ad should show (not always) the product quite a lot.

Emotion is ranked number one, and for a reason.

People buy because of emotion,** not logic. Logic comes into play when people justify why they bought the product (I will share emotions/triggers to target later).
Also, rule 10 may seem like a 'duh' rule, but you'll be surprised how often this gets forgotten. Ensure (most of the time) that you show the product in the first 2 seconds and that the ad is full of product 'demos'. Now, knowing how to make a killer ad all comes from prep. A chef cannot cook without ingredients; the higher the quality of those ingredients, the better (refer to research training for more info on this).

Now, you have to know the most important parts of an ad.
The most important part of an ad is the FIRST SECOND. This is where most of your effort should be. Have you done enough to hook the audience's attention? (Don't clickbait. More on that later).

As the late great Ogvilvy said, you should spend 80% of your time on a headline. This is usually also what the 'big promise' is about. What are you promising your audience? When you publish ads into the feed, you are **fighting** for attention, not just with other ads but, more importantly, with organic content people want to watch. This means our ads need to be entertaining from start to finish. No dull moments are allowed.

What makes a good hook? Something visually or audibly intrigues the audience. This might be a claim like I saw in an ad recently. It led with 'I heard my husband was sharing pictures of his meat with colleagues,' and the text hook was 'He was sending pics of his meet to who?! '

That was a great representation of a solid hook. It is also a great example of what I call the WOW factor, meaning who else is putting that in their ads? This is not something I see in many ads and I watch a lot.

So, always ask yourself when creating/editing an ad, ‘What can I put in this that’s unique?’ Please note that sometimes a simple ‘three reasons why’ ad will work and CRUSH, but creating cookie-cutter ads shouldn't be our business objective. It’s a good way to cap our growth and blend into a sea of average agencies.The WOW factor will also help our ads be memorable. Grabbing attention is no longer enough. We need people to remember our ads, or at least the products and what’s good about them.

Ask yourself, what is the last ad you remember? Hell, what did you have for lunch three Thursdays ago?

Stuff moves very quickly, and we are bombarded with more content and information than ever (and this will only increase). If we can make our ads memorable, we win. A big way to increase memorability is to increase watch time. The more people watch, the more invested they are (the more entertaining your ad is, the more they’ll watch). You have a better chance of remembering something you watched for 40 seconds than 3 seconds. Another great way to be memorable is to inject humour, which I’ll touch upon later.

I’ve also mentioned entertaining a few times (which is also a great way to increase memorability) so i’ll give you a few pointers on how to inject that:

- Irony (this is a cornerstone of great storytelling).
- Using high contrast (this taps into peoples psychology BIG time) - ‘I feel like a one-legged man in an ass-kicking contest’.
- Talking about embarrassing stories.
- Talking about sex (doesn’t have to be super overt) and I’ve seen this in some many winning ads.
- Mocking the competition (this takes so much finesse that most of the time its worth avoiding).

ANYWAY, I digress, back to hooks...

A hook can also be a dynamic movement, something visually satisfying, or something as simple as a zoom.

(You’ll be able to find more examples in the ‘hook inspiration’ section in Notion).

The text hook also falls into this (I only mentioned visual).

The text hook in my opinion should include a benefit while trying to drive curiosity.

A lot of people try to only drive curiosity in some clever way but this only works if you're an excellent copywriter, most of the time you just end up confusing people.

If you're writing a hook that has a clear promise for the audience and reason to keep watching you'll be better than 90% of the competition.

The second most important part is 1-3 seconds. You have the audience hooked, so give them a reason to keep watching.

Tell the audience what is in it for them, either with a benefit or tease a reason to keep watching for a later payoff. This will depend on your ad's awareness level or what format you're going for (more on this later).

The third most important part is 3-5 seconds. You've done the hard part by getting them past 3 seconds. Usually, here, we need the audience to know the best benefit of your product (if it has not been mentioned before).

Especially if you're going with a story lead, this means the audience must know why the payoff benefits them if you've teased them in the 1-3 second mark.

If you have already given them the benefit, **rehook** the audience to get them to watch longer.

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Here's how you could do this Open with your statement hook, provide your best benefit, and then say something like, 'Three reasons I'm obsessed with these pants.'

Do you see how that works to hook them back in?

This is the 80/20 rule for ads. The first 3 seconds of your ad will make or break it. When creating an ad, spend 80% of your time on the first 3 seconds.

After creating the first 5 seconds of an ad, ask yourself these questions.

1. Will this ad hook the audience?
2. What promise am I giving them?
3. Does the audience know what's in it for them?
4. Is there any confusion or disconnect?
5. Does it correctly target an emotion?

When going through these questions, it is much more beneficial to point out the negatives and what could be better. This will help us create better ads and win (it doesn't mean be a dick).

Let me quickly touch on question number 4. Ads need to be simple, have zero confusion, and not clickbait.

If people are confused, they will not buy. Clickbait is also a big no-no (when I say clickbait, I mean something spammy to grab attention that isn't relevant to what the ad is selling).

If we do not give a payoff with our hooks, people will not buy and will not keep watching.

Also, the problem I have with clickbait is that we want relevant attention—the attention of people who will buy.

What's next?

Just because the first 5 seconds are the most important, that doesn't mean the rest of the ad can go to shit.

The longer people watch the video, the more exposed they are to the selling and all the great stuff about your product or service.

This means they see more benefits, social proof, and authority, which means they are more likely to be sold on why they should buy the product.

Again, there cannot be any dull moments after the 5-second mark.

Keep the views engaged with good cuts, use engaging people, use clips of people saying awesome stuff about the product, and use product demos (to name a few).

NOTE: There should be some kind of cut every 2-3 seconds at least, but it should extend to 3-5 for people over 50 (general guidelines).

A great rule of thumb is that the length of a video should be within your age range. If you're targeting 20-—to 30-year-olds, make ads that are 20-30 seconds in length.

The older generation has a longer attention span because their brain wasn't cooked by reels.

Elements the video should include (don't have to apply all always, and you can see different frameworks in Notion):

- Promise
- Benefits
- Features
- Social proof
- Credibility/Authority

- Risk reversals
- CTA

All ads must end with a CTA because we must remember that our ads are there to drive action, and the action we want is for people to pull out their wallets and buy.

This is a crucial point I need you to drill into your head: if our ads do not make sales, we will cease to exist. We are a performance agency, and our ads must make sales.

Always remember this when creating an ad. While it must be engaging and entertaining, it must also make sales.

This brings us to another point: ugly ads. You'll often hear me talk about them, and the great Barry Hott coined the term.

Ugly ads aren't about making content that looks shit. It's about creating content that resonates deeply with your audience and makes them want to purchase.

When we are editing, I am not looking for something that looks like it's from the TV. That is far too polished (sometimes polished content is good, though). I want it to look like it's from social media.

(But I want 99% of our clips to include great lighting this is a MUST).

I want our ads to look NATIVE to the platform.

How do you make ads that look native?

You must study ads on the platform. I know it sounds obvious, but you would be surprised how little people do this.

Spend at least 10 minutes a day watching ads and taking notes on how they hook the audience, their cuts, and how they layer the video.

It will give you tons of inspo and make you a better editor or strategist. To make great ads, you must consume great ads.

Now, let's expand on some of the things I promised I would earlier.

Above, I mentioned something called 'awareness levels,' which the late great Eugene Schwartz coined and discussed in detail in his book Breakthrough Advertising.

I won't go into loads of details here, but I will give you the basics, as different awareness levels demand different styles of ads.

The five awareness levels are:

- Unaware = They are unaware of a problem they could be facing, aren't looking for a solution, and definitely have no clue about our client's products. These are the hardest people to convert but the pool of audience is huge.
- Problem aware = They know they have a problem but have no idea there's a solution for it.
- Solution-aware = They know they have a problem, and they know a solution exists, but they don't know our clients' solution exists.
- Product-aware = They know of our product and will most likely want it. Remind them of the benefits and give them a great offer.
- Most aware** = Most likely fans of the product, already purchased. Let these people know about new products etc.

This is important because the formula will change for each awareness level.

Note that most advertising is done in the product-aware category. We do not want to be like most advertisers.

Unaware ads will be story leads, making users aware of their problem and then offering a solution.

Problem-aware ads, can start with a proclamation lead. For example, if you want to target people in winter who are getting ill, you could lead with this… 'Why the Chinese NEVER get sick!'

Then, talk about the supplement you're selling, which is packed full of herbs from China.

The grey area between can start with secret leads. These people know they have a problem and are only beginning to realise solutions. Here is an example:

> *Amazing Secret of the One-Legged Golfer adds 50 yards to your drive overnight.*

Solution-aware ads can start with problem-solution. Here is an example of if I were selling to older men with prostate problems:

> *Do you wake up to pee multiple times a night?*

Then, I would go on to sell them using my solution. You start with the problem and dive straight into the solution. With the previous awareness levels, you must warm them up before diving straight into the solution.

Product-aware ads can start with a promise lead. Here's an example:

> *'Grow your hair 10x quicker with this magical serum!'*

Most aware ads can just be a straight-up offer lead. Here's an example:

> *'Buy our bestselling pants now, 20% OFF!'*

There is a fundamental overview of awareness levels, and there will be a section in the Notion with ads that target different awareness levels so you can see them.

Most advertising is done in the product-aware category, but that's not where we want to live.

Why?

This limits the number of people we can target with our ads to get people to buy.

As you slide towards the unaware category, the number of people gets larger, but they become more challenging to convert as they are a 'colder audience'.

So our job is to take these strangers (unaware) and slide them down to product-aware and most-aware.

How?

Start with a story lead and guide them through level by level. You can do this in an ad or have multiple ads going for different levels (I recommend doing both).

Note: A great way of guiding people through these levels is constantly teasing the payoff at the end.

This is why you'll see different leads for each stage—you must talk to them differently.

I'm telling you this because, as an editor or strategist, you must understand that advertising is a form of communication, and you cannot talk to everyone the same way. Do you talk to everyone the same way in your life? Do you talk to your grandparents the same way you talk to your friends?

You have to understand why storytelling is crucial for effective advertising. Simply put, getting better at telling stories will make better ads that connect with and persuade more people.

So, what does this look like in an ad? Say you're editing an advert that you know is for solution-awareness, and you begin with the problem-solution lead.

That's a great start. You shouldn't then immediately blast someone with BUY NOW GET 1 FREE; it wouldn't make sense, would it?

The audience would feel a disconnect and bounce. You must guide the audience through the ad.

My final point on awareness levels is that when we first hop onto an account, the best awareness level to choose is 'solution aware' and lead with the problem-solution lead. These are effective and have a solid chance of turning into evergreen ads.

This solution aware level has a good balance of targeting more people, but they are still a warm audience as they are looking for a solution or want one.

The word choice of 'want' is intentional here. People rarely buy what they need but instead will buy what they WANT.

Remember, people don't buy for logical reasons. It's all emotional.

This is a perfect segue to share the emotions and triggers I mentioned earlier.

I will split these into two groups.
The first will be the Life Force 8 coined by Drew Whitman.

The second will be 'mindstates' from Sarah Levinger, who, I believe, built on these from Will Leech.

The Life Force 8 are:

1. Survival, Enjoyment of Life, Life Extension: The fundamental drive to stay alive and enhance the quality and longevity of life.
2. Enjoyment of Food and Beverages: The desire for sustenance and pleasure derived from eating and drinking.
3. Freedom from Fear, Pain, and Danger: The need for safety, security, and peace of mind.
4. Sexual Companionship: The drive for intimacy, relationships, and sexual fulfillment.
5. Comfortable Living Conditions: The aspiration for a pleasant and convenient environment at home and work.
6. To Be Superior, Winning, Keeping Up with Others: The urge to achieve status, recognition, and not be left behind by peers.

7. Care and Protection of Loved Ones: The desire to provide for and safeguard family and close friends.
8. Social Approval: The need for acceptance, appreciation, and validation from others.

And the 'mindstates' are:

1. Autonomy: The desire for complete independence and freedom in life.

2. Achievement: The desire to achieve success or obtain a goal.

3. Belonging: The desire for social connections, interconnectivity, and belonging.

4. Competence: The desire to feel intelligent, especially when making decisions.

5. Esteem: The desire for respect, recognition, and appeal – especially physically.

6. Engagement: The desire for unique and satisfying life experiences.

7. Empowerment: The desire for authority over oneself, feeling confident in your ability.

8. Nurturance: The desire to care for and support yourself, or family and friends.

9. Security: The desire to feel safe, protected, and free from risk.

You'll see here that there are similarities between the two, but there is also nuance.

I want you to study these emotional triggers because emotion is everything. Emotion comes first.

To put this into practice, whenever you make an ad, I want you to be able to answer which emotion, mindstate,or emotional trigger (or whatever you want to label it) your ad is targeting.

If you can't answer this, scrap it and start again. If you feel your approach to targeting this emotion isn't strong enough, scrap it and start again.

Strategists, you will need to determine this ahead of time when you are making a brief or script. If you think about it afterwards, you have failed.

Editors, when choosing clips, think about which ones align with these emotions the best and which ones EVOKE THE MOST EMOTION.

I will never stop harping on about emotion. It's the cornerstone of advertising.

A lot of the magic is what you show the audience, not what you tell them (but both together is real alchemy). The clips MUST match the emotion.

Say you're selling a supplement that helps heal a gut problem that is causing someone pain.

When you are talking about that pain, it would make no sense to show someone smiling and jumping out of a plane. It's an extreme example, but you get the point.

The last thing I want to touch upon is… KNOW YOUR NUMBERS.

What is the data from the ads launched?

Strategists, you'll be living in the numbers.

But editors, I expect you to know your numbers also. I need you to be curious about them and understand them.

Bark at the strats to give you the data.

And strats inform the designers on what's working well.

You should both hold each other accountable to request and provide the data.

I want you to know if the hook you created did well or not.

I want you to think, 'Okay, when I did this, I got a 40% hook rate, but when I did this, I only got a 15% hook rate, so next time, I'll try more stuff like the one that got 40%.'

This makes building ads so much easier.

And this goes for other metrics like watch time, cost per purchase, and spend (the most important).

Refer to training in Notion around metrics and what they mean.

There is too much disconnect between designers and data at other agencies, which leads to designers 'flying blind' and not knowing WHY something works or doesn't.

The WHY is everything; context is everything.

Final thoughts

If you've made it this far, I appreciate you, and you should have a great understanding of what makes a killer performance ad.

Keeping all this in mind will put you in the top 1% of editors/designers/strats (this is only the start of the rabbit hole, though).

It'll make creating winning ads much easier, making your clients and you more money.

Remember, advertising has a lot of nuance, so take some of what I say with a pinch of salt. This is just my unfiltered thoughts on what makes great performance advertising.

It's also why I say that assumptions are the death of marketers. A lot of information is out there that tells you what the audience wants.

But you have to let the market tell you if it's good or not, and that's why I always say…

Be curious, don't be afraid to fuck up test things for yourself. People who do this are beyond valuable.

Again, thank you for making it this far, but go back to the top and reread this as I promise you, you won't have retained enough.