

How best to market to business professionals?

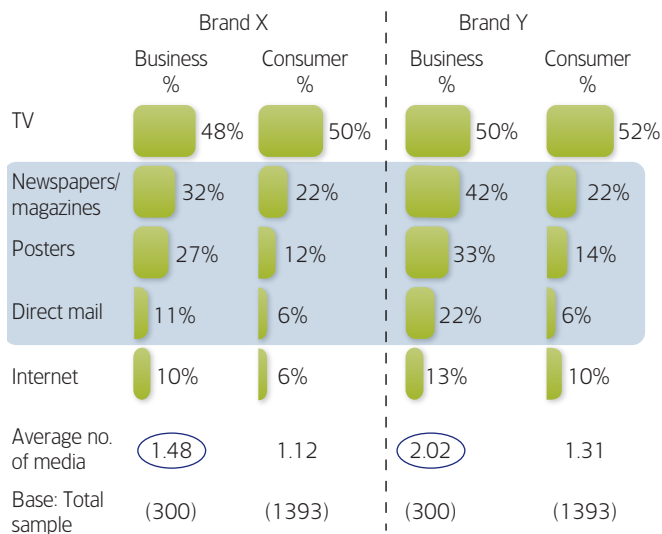
Business professionals are also consumers, and they respond to advertising in both capacities. They notice and remember advertising, and are more likely to pay attention to advertising that they enjoy or appreciate. All the main media can be employed successfully to reach this audience, but it should be understood that business professionals have a personal appreciation of advertising, as well as a professional view.

Typically business professionals deny (at least in public) that they are influenced by advertising, as indeed do almost all consumers! However, that is not the case: They do retain associations and imagery from the advertising they encounter.

Business professionals notice advertising. In this example from a financial market, the two leading brands both have higher ad awareness among their business targets than among general consumers, particularly for newspapers, posters and direct mail.

Business users are more aware of (mainstream) secondary media

In which of the following places have you seen, heard or read anything about...recently?



Ads don't just do things to business professionals; business professionals also do things with ads. Through advertising — and other communications as well — they make themselves familiar with the options available, and build up a landscape of organizations and services which they view as suitable in particular contexts. They attach character, meaning and associations to these brands, absorbing not only their practical offerings, but also their imagery and “personality”.

Reactions to advertising

Professionals' reactions to advertising depend on two aspects: the respondents' professional roles, and their personal characteristics.

Sometimes ads are treated as an intrusion, or even seen as negative. Business professionals often want to reject the commercialism that is implied by advertising, and the attempt to influence their decision making. However, they do acknowledge that ads play a useful role in keeping people informed.

An individual's personality and outlook will also influence their appreciation of advertising. Many people enjoy ads. They can brighten the chore of reading professional publications, and provide amusement and pleasure, in contrast to the serious articles. On the negative side, ads are sometimes found irritating. Some ads are simply ignored. This is espe-

cially true of ads that are perceived as boring and unimaginative, or over-complicated and confusing, or if the visual presentation does not clearly draw out the point of the ad.

It is also apparent that business audiences notice ads that are not specifically targeted at them, since they are also consumers in a wider context. So all the market messages for the brand should be consistent in their broad positioning, regardless of the target.

Print

Print advertising is often a primary medium of communication between a business-to-business company and potential purchasers. Business professionals typically have access to a variety of different magazines and newspapers targeted at their sector. These are often read only superficially and out of a sense of obligation; professionals need to keep up-to-date and watch out for information of specific importance to them. The time spent on ads and the attention paid to detail are both minimal. To be effective, ads have to be designed to function in this context of selective attention and pressure to scan the publication as quickly and efficiently as possible. However some business titles are designed to be lighter and more appealing, and are read during leisure time.

One advantage of print media — in the business just as in a more general context — is that the reader has control over the medium. They can take additional time to consider an ad (or an article) that they find new, interesting or intriguing. In contrast, material that comes across as familiar or boring attracts little or no attention. We find that print ads tend to “wear out” after three exposures. It may take one or two “opportunities to see” before real exposure to an ad takes place: That is, the individual registers the ad, and takes time to absorb it. The corollary is highly important: If someone has already seen an ad a few times but not paid attention to it, it is highly unlikely that they ever will; and if they have paid it attention once already and absorbed it, they will not bother to do so again.

There comes a point, then, when providing more and more opportunities to see the same ad is a wasteful exercise. What is needed is a new ‘twist’ in execution and/or message to draw attention again.

See the Knowledge Point *How do I maximize my print budget?* for more on this.

Online

The Web is developing into an ideal medium for communicating with business professionals, who usually have ready access to the internet at work. While there are major issues with spam, the internet can be a great, cost-effective vehicle for well-targeted direct communication. The Web offers the ability to target your audience: Ads relevant to the webpage on which they are placed are more likely to be effective. The Web also allows for a large amount of information to be communicated where appropriate. Web sites devoted to brands are common, and as well as conveying details of the offering, they can also convey the brand's character and personality through the use of imagery, including video.

See the Knowledge Points *How to maximize the return from your online display advertising* and *Using Web sites as part of the marketing mix* for more on this.

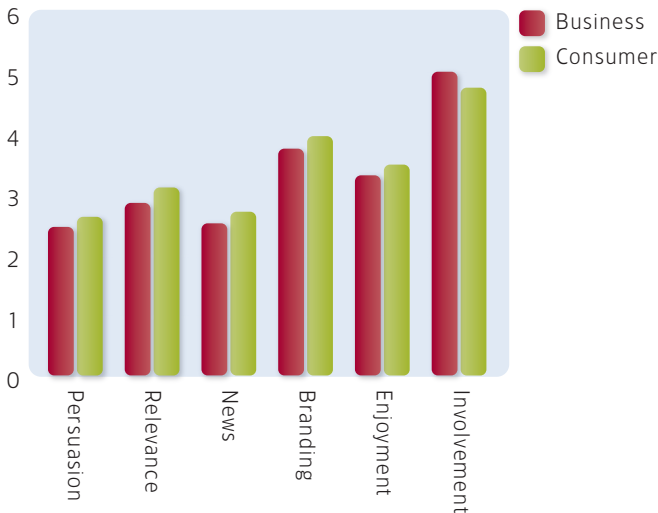
Television

For reasons of cost and targeting, television is not commonly used for business-to-business advertising. When it is used, it is often employed suboptimally. The chart below contrasts the performance of business-to-business TV ads with consumer TV ads in the United States. They perform weaker on all key dimensions except Involvement; (but this stronger score reflects what can be described as a “negative involvement” — the ads are more likely to be viewed as irritating and unpleasant.) This should not be taken to mean that TV advertising cannot be used for a business audience; there are examples of successful business-to-business ad-

vertising which show it can be effective. But our databases show that higher income, higher social class respondents — those to whom such advertising is often targeted — tend to be more critical of advertising in general.

Business ads rated weaker on most aspects

US TV ads



needs, this research acts as a useful reminder that customers can also find them useful, when they are appropriately positioned.

Another project illustrated the importance of this relationship when the right balance is found. It reported that if a respected contact moved to a new company, the business was likely to follow. Individual relationships can be more important than the brand.

Knowledge Points are drawn from the Millward Brown Knowledge Bank, consisting of our databases of 80,000 brand reports and 40,000 ads, as well as 1,200 case studies, 900 conference papers and magazine articles, and 350 Learnings documents.

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Customer relationship management

While not viewed as part of the advertising budget, CRM (customer relationship management) has a major role to play in building the brand relationship with the consumer. Experiences with sales people and pre- and post-sales interactions can really color perceptions of the brand. This encompasses many dimensions, both practical (such as problem solving, the provision of information, and access to events, forums and workshops) and emotional, (including respect, friendship and a sense of partnership).

A recent project among one business audience highlighted that business professionals could be segmented into six groups, based on aspects such as their interest in their job, their need for social recognition, their interest in new developments, and their balance between team work and working as an individual. Their requirements for a CRM program varied considerably by segment. While business-to-business companies tend to view CRM programs as serving their own