

The OPA releases a Best Practise Guide for Online Advertising

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In their pursuit of creative excellence in digital design, the Online Publishers Association (OPA) launched the Bookmarks, South Africa's first independent digital awards, in 2008. Their objective for 2009 is to continue to highlight the importance of quality digital design, and in so doing, have created a new position on their board, Head of Creative, the sole focus of which is to nurture digital creative excellence by establishing a best practise benchmark. This inaugural position is filled by Ben Wagner, CEO of Stonewall+. Wagner's first initiative, in collaboration with leading digital figureheads, has been to create a Best Practise Guide for Online Advertising, highlighting key factors which determine effective online creative.

The OPA's rationale behind inspiring great digital creative is not only to promote the medium with designers and advertising agencies, but that in turn, these creative opinion leaders educate and motivate their clients as to the benefits and possibilities inherent in the online medium. This will ultimately benefit the publisher and the industry as a whole. Further to this, quality digital advertising will ensure better performance, argues Adrian Hewlett, OPA chairperson. "Internet publishers are often held accountable for the performance of campaigns run on their sites, very often regardless of the quality of the creative material being used by the advertiser.

"This guide is the first step in a series of 'Best Practise' guides which the OPA plans to publish this year. Through these Best Practise guides we aim to achieve better returns for the advertiser, and happier client relationships for the publisher," concludes Hewlett.

According to Wagner the guide emphasises the need for creativity to be disciplined, "This cannot be more evident when designing banners which typically have file size restrictions. However, this doesn't provide an excuse to deliver conceptually weak work, or even worse, overzealous messaging that is created as an attempt to communicate multiple messages within a 'vanilla' concept."

Best Practise Guide for Digital Advertising

Brand Prominence

Ensure that the brand is prominently displayed on all frames

Frame Messaging

Each frame should attempt to communicate the following:

- Product brand awareness
- Communicate message/benefits/differentiation
- Communicate brand like-ability/reason to purchase or call to action

Ad Effectiveness

- Think carefully about using rich media, particularly "reveal" ad formats.

Viewers are confronted with content and don't have time to interact with obscure creative. Three seconds is the gap you have.

- Understand your audience, a rich media campaign won't work for a low bandwidth user.

Message Simplicity

- This is an ad, not a brochure. Focus on the message and use the creative concept to push the message home.
- Don't over elaborate with complexity and multiple message points, 7 words is the maximum for your message.

Include a URL in the advertising

- Enough said

Engage, but don't make people work for the message

- Viewers should never have to labour to understand your ad
- Interaction with the ad should be easy, not complicated
- Use interactive formats to reveal more information via drill-down or roll-over.

Persuasion vs Awareness

- If your objective is persuasion rather than awareness, be careful not to annoy the site visitor
- Avoid highly obtrusive ads
- Remember targeting is critical - don't show irrelevant ads to people

Integrate online creative concepts with offline

- Use creative elements that are consistent with offline ads.

Try to avoid “border” ads - ad sizes that frame the content of a webpage

- They train site visitors to focus on the centre of the page and tune out ads.
- Rectangle ad sizes do not frame content and are therefore more noticeable.

Test creative vs placement

- Online offers flexibility around changing creative and placement environments that other media channels don't offer
- Test creative options and see which executions are giving you the best results, i.e. click-through ratios.

Wagner also recommends two online resources for banner campaigns, www.bannerblog.com.au, and www.doubleclick.com/insight/gallery/.

The OPA plans to further this initiative with practical workshops in June. Dates and information to follow.

For more information on effective digital advertising, please contact Ben Wagner on , or call Theresa Vitale on 011 454 3534.

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